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THE MARAUDERS SEEMED ASTOUNDED AT DASHING CHARLIE'S DARING ACT, IN ADVANCING FROM THE THICKET TO FACE THEM.

Dashing Charlie,

THE WILD WEST DETECTIVE;

OR,

The Bravos of Borderland.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

DASHING CHARLIE BARS THE WAY.

AMONG a clump of bushes on a trail through New Mexico a man stood resting, his hands crossed upon his rifle.

He was over six feet in height, of slender, yet athletic physique, a beardless face full of expression, daring and determination, long, golden hair, piercing blue eyes, and the air of one at home amid the wilds and perils of the trackless border.

He wore buckskin leggings, fringed down the outer seam and stuck in top-boots, a woolen hunting-shirt, broad-brimmed sombrero and belt-of-arms.

Behind him stood a splendid roan stallion, wearing a silver-mounted saddle and bridle, and with the traps of a prairie traveler strapped behind it.

The man was Charlie Emmett, scout, guide and Indian-fighter, and whose name as Dashing Charlie, the White Scalper, had gained him fame from the Rio Grande to the head-waters of the Missouri River.

He had guided a gold-train thus far on its way toward Texas, having led it through dangers innumerable in the mining region of New Mexico, where many lawless men sought to get possession of it by all means that cunning and villainy could devise.

Now he was on his way back to the mines, where, under the guise of gold-hunting, he had been playing the part of a detective of the border.

Convinced that a band of marauders were on the trail of the Texas-bound train, Dashing Charlie had halted in the track to endeavor to check the villains' advance or to hold them at bay.

As he stood there in the thicket, waiting with the patience of an Indian, he mused aloud, his eyes meanwhile on the alert for the foe, who were looked for to approach over a rise a quarter of a mile away through a fringe of timber that denoted the presence of a large stream, while beyond it were the foot-hills of a range of rugged mountains.

"Well, I believe Captain Markham's gold-train is at last safe, for his guide, Rifle Ben, is a brave fellow and as cunning as a Comanche.

"I hope they took my advice, though, to bury the gold; so if the Marauders do overtake them, they can act without fear of losing the treasure.

"Of course I cannot hope to delay the villains long, yet I can hold them for awhile, I know."

Ere long his eyes fell upon something moving at the top of the rise.

"Ah! they are coming.

"We will soon have to dig out from here, good horse, so you must do your best, for they have got some flyers in the way of horse-flesh in that band of cut-throats."

Over the rise there appeared the head and shoulders of a man, and soon after there appeared in full view a horseman.

Behind him came others, in Indian file, and soon after all had appeared in view, being nine in number.

The leader was a man dressed in black from head to foot, wore a close-fitting mask of sable that completely hid his face, had long, black hair, was armed to the teeth, and possessed a form that was elegant in contour and carriage.

He rode with the perfect ease and grace of a thorough horseman, and was armed with silver-mounted revolvers, while his hat was a black sombrero of richest quality.

His men came behind him like soldiers well disciplined, and they were moving at a brisk trot.

All were well-mounted and armed, and they looked like a very dangerous party to encounter.

And yet Dashing Charlie stood quietly in the thicket, his eyes scanning the leader most minutely with a field-glass which he held to his eyes.

The roan stallion began to show signs of uneasiness, as though he knew the coming horsemen were foes to his master.

At last Dashing Charlie's attitude changed. He put aside his glass, took up his rifle and raised it slowly to his shoulder.

"I could kill the chief, but I will not do so, for he must live to be hanged," said Charlie, as he raised the rifle slowly to his shoulder, preparing to open fire upon the coming Mountain Marauders.

He ran his eye along the sights, and it covered the outlaw chief.

Then he changed it to the man following him.

"No, I will not kill a man without warning—I will drop a horse to let them know I bar their way, and then I will empty a saddle after my warning shot," said Charlie, quietly, and again he raised his rifle for action.

The coming horsemen were now not very far from the thicket that sheltered the man in ambush, and they came on as though suspecting no danger.

They were heading directly toward the thicket, around which the trail ran, when, suddenly, amid the green foliage appeared a puff of white smoke, and a sharp report instantly followed.

The man next behind the leader was thrown heavily to the ground as his horse dropped dead under him, a bullet in his brain.

Instantly there was wild excitement among the horsemen, and all began to fall back quickly.

But a bugle-note sounded by their chief, who did not waver, caused them to form a line quickly, and down upon the prairie dropped horses and riders for safety, for the animals ridden by the Marauders were as thoroughly trained as were their riders.

At that instant Dashing Charlie rode out of the thicket and confronted them, while from his lips broke a long, ringing cry of defiance as he raised his rifle slowly to his shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

A WEIRD TRAIL TO FOLLOW.

THE Marauders seemed astounded at the daring act of Dashing Charlie, in advancing from the thicket to face them, alone, and apparently with no support near.

But they soon realized that it was no time for comment, but action, as, with the second crack of his rifle, a man who had sought shelter by lying down behind his horse was seen to be mortally wounded.

Then the scout turned his horse and rode leisurely back to the thicket.

The outlaw leader gave a bugle-call, and the men were upon their horses at once.

Surely the daring borderman must have aid in the thicket, for he would not otherwise be so bold.

But when he saw that the outlaws were preparing for a rush, he knew that he dared not tarry there, for they were armed with long-range carbines and would at once bring them into action.

A wound to himself, however slight, or to his horse, might mean death.

So, content with having killed an outlaw, for upon this point he felt no doubt, and brought down a horse, thus crippling them, he decided to take no more chances, but to push on rapidly.

As he rode out of the thicket he discovered that the Marauders had one man in reserve with several led horses and pack-animals, for they now came in sight.

"Well, this will detain them an hour at least, and that means considerable to Captain Markham and his men.

"If they buried the gold, well and good, even if they are overtaken; but if not, I very much fear me that the ranchero's pretty daughter, Miss Beatrice Markham, will lose her fortune, and a legacy it is worthy of a great struggle to keep.

"Poor old Matt Markham! A noble fellow he was, if he did go wrong in his younger years, and he atoned for the suffering he had caused his brother by leaving his daughter nearly a quarter of a million dollars in good gold.

"How he has toiled for long years to get and hold this gold, and at last death came to him when he had enough to live in luxury.

"I am glad I was able to bring his brother to him before he died, and to start him and his daughter's gold in safety on the way home.

"But, those fellows are coming with a rush, so, Comanche, you must show them that you have winged feet.

"Come, old horse, get away, and with all speed, too!"

The fine animal bounded away with a will just as the outlaws came charging upon the thicket with yells and shots.

The bullets from their carbines came rattling after the flying horseman, one grazing his hat-brim and another striking a stirrup.

But no damage was done, and before a second volley came the scout was about out of range, and his fleet-running roan was readily distancing his pursuers.

"They crowded us a little too close that time, Comanche, for comfort; but there is not one of their horses that can run with you.

"Now to flank them, get back to the ford, and follow their trail, for I must be at the mines, old horse, as soon as possible."

The gallant roan ere long dropped his pursuers out of sight, and, making a flank movement, Dashing Charlie kept up a rapid canter for several miles, when he came to a ford across a swiftly-flowing stream between high banks.

So on, into the foot-hills and thence into the mountains he wended his way, following the trail of the outlaws in their pursuit of the gold-train.

It was nearing twilight when he suddenly drew rein.

There, in the bend of a small stream, was a deserted camp, deserted by the living, yet held by the dead.

It was a startling scene, a bivouac of the dead, for a camp-fire blazed brightly near by, and there, scattered about, lay half a dozen dead forms.

"Miners from the valley mines," decided Dashing Charlie, as he gazed upon them, appearing to recognize the white, upturned faces, so motionless, so pallid.

"What does it mean?" he muttered. "Why, what can it mean, save that the Mountain Marauders have overhauled them here and slaughtered them—No! I do not see a single wound!"

"They have not been shot, they have not been knifed, yet they are dead!"

"They are from the mines, too—ah! I have it! They are a wild lot who sought to capture Captain Markham's gold-train!"

"This, then, is the second party wiped out upon the trail of that fatal gold!"

"Well, they are human and I must not be less human. I will bury them decently at least, to save them from the snarling coyotes."

He set about his task, and as he went from man to man, Dashing Charlie at last cried in a startled way:

"My God! these men have been poisoned!"

This knowledge seemed to impress him deeply; but he went on with his work of burying the dead, after which he threw more wood upon the blazing logs, kindled by hands then forever stilled, and cooking his frugal supper, prepared for a night's rest.

Instead of pushing on, as had been his intention, he determined to remain all night and follow on the trail the outlaws and the slain men had come, when the daylight would reveal all to him plainly.

He was in the saddle bright and early, the next morning, and after a long ride came upon another deserted camp, and where other dead men only remained!

"This was the scene of a hot fight," he said as he glanced about him. "Dandy Nick, who overtook us, said that the party whom we sent as a blind, to fool the road-agents, had believed that they really carried the gold, and so determined to seize it, killing him to make all secure."

"He was lucky to make his escape and overtake us, but he is wrong in saying that it was the outlaws who rushed in upon the traitors while they were fighting for the gold."

"No, they were the men whom I buried last night, and they were in their turn followed by the outlaws."

"Well, these, too, should receive the burial of human beings, though these wolves about here have already been feasting upon the poor devils."

"I didn't expect to play the undertaker upon so large a scale when I set out upon this trail; but here goes."

And the mutilated remains of the dead in this camp were also buried by the scout, who then rode rapidly on his way, following the trail of the party who had met with such a mysterious death back at the other camp.

It was drawing toward sunset when he came in sight of the charred remains of what had once been a stout cabin of logs.

As he rode up to the spot, he beheld a man busily engaged in poking about in the ashes, as though in search of something, while he was so deeply occupied in his work that he did not notice the approach of the scout until he was almost upon him.

CHAPTER III.

A WARNING.

"WELL, Hunter Dave, what are you searching for?"

The scout asked the question in a very careless way, but he had in his hand his revolver, and, as the one addressed uttered a startled cry and turned toward him, at the same time dropping his hand upon a weapon in his belt, he called out:

"Don't draw that weapon, Davy, or I will pull trigger and you know I never miss."

"Say, Pard Charlie, what has you ag'in me?" growled the man, who was a large, raw-boned fellow, clad half as a miner, half as an Indian, and whose face was the sure index of a scoundrel.

"Ob, nothing; only I know you have made several threats against me, and I wished to be prepared for you."

"Whar is yer goin'?"

"I have decided to make this my home, Davil, so was coming home."

"To live among ther ashes here?"

"Not exactly."

"To s'arch among ther ashes then, fer some o' old Matt Markham's gold?"

"Not I, for I just returned from seeing it all safe on its way far toward Texas, under the charge of Captain Markham."

"Then yer dodged ther Mountain Marauders, did yer?" growled the man.

"Oh! did you know they were after us Hunter Dave?"

"I knows nothin' about 'em, Dashing Charlie."

"Well, did you expect to find some of the old miner's gold in the ashes of his cabin?"

"Maybe; but were it true that he were buried in his cabin, and it then were burned down over him?"

"Yes, that was his last wish, so I carried it out."

"And he is beneath ther ashes thar?"

"He is, and his ghost will haunt this spot, you may be sure."

"I doesn't berlieve in ghosts, Dashing Charlie, so you can't scare me."

"Well, I shall haunt the place, for I intend to live down there in old Matt Markham's first home, the cave in the cliff, and if I catch any one prowling about his grave, I'll be more dangerous than a ghost, you may be certain, Davy."

"I hain't afeerd o' any man, Dashing Charlie," retorted Hunter Dave, in an ugly mood.

"Well, I am, for I am afraid of just such treacherous men as you are, Hunter Dave, who would strike one in the back, but never face him fair and square, if you had aught against him."

"Is you trying to pick a quarrel with me?" was the threatening demand.

"No, for you won't fight; but I do know that you have tried several times to pick me off from an ambush, and so I tell you plainly that if you wish war to the knife, just say so at once."

"I doesn't want no trouble with you, Dashing Charlie."

"All right; see that you don't provoke it; and more—keep away from about here."

"And I'll give you the same advice about my home, young feller."

"I'll not come, Hunter Dave, unless I am after you for some of your deviltry," was the reply of the scout, still warily on guard against the man's treachery.

"Does yer mean ter threaten me, Charlie Emmett?"

"I mean to warn you, Hunter Dave, and you can take it as you please."

"Many men in the mines believe you to be an innocent, good-for-nothing sort of a fellow; but I know you to be a scamp, and shall keep my eye upon you as I would upon a Comanche."

"You have no business about this cabin, so don't come again unless you utterly disregard my warning."

"Now go."

"You talk big now, Dashing Charlie, but some day we'll meet when I hold trumps, and then you'll ing low and soft."

The scout laughed, and the man, with a muttered oath, mounted his horse and rode from the spot.

Charlie Emmett gazed after him for a moment and then mused:

"I am almost certain that his pretended hunting expeditions in the mountains are nothing more than trips to meet Muello, the Mexican, and post him about the camps."

"I only wish I could catch him in something I could lay my hands on, for I would see that he had a grave built for him very quickly, for all the miners would need would be a hint that he was the spy of the outlaw chief."

"Now, to see my future home and make myself as comfortable there as possible."

He left the burned cabin of the miner beneath the ashes of which was the grave of its former master, and wended his way down the canyon toward a rugged mountain spur which jutted out into a fertile valley, well timbered and watered.

Up at the head of the canyon was a cavern of large size, and this was to be the home of the dauntless scout-detective, for it was well protected, roomy and dry.

It had been fenced up with logs, a chimney had been built of rough stones and clay, and altogether it was quite a comfortable home.

Here had Miner Matt Markham lived until he built his cabin at the mouth of the valley, and here had he a secret hiding-place for the large amount of gold he had accumulated.

"Well, horse pard, there is excellent pasturage here for you, and we will not be uncomfortable I guess, after I've gone to the camps and gotten what things we need."

"We must keep both eyes and ears open, old horse, for we have more foes than friends here, and it will not do to be taken by surprise—ah! here is something I had not noticed before."

It was a placard, written in red ink, and was stuck upon a tree at the entrance to the canyon.

It read as follows:

WARNING!

"Let Dashing Charlie take notice that unless he leaves the Valley Camps within ten days he will become food for coyotes."

"Well, Comanche, we won't heed the warning, and we won't become wolf food either," said the scout with a reckless laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOUNDED RANCHERO.

ABOUT A day's ride from the thicket where Dashing Charlie Emmett had stood off for a short

while the band of Mountain Marauders of the Trail, a man was riding slowly along upon the day following the scout's skirmish with the outlaws.

His horse was jaded, his head hanging down as he walked slowly along, while the rider reeled in his saddle like a drunken man.

But one look was sufficient to show that he was weak and suffering, for he was slowly bleeding to death.

The horseman was dressed well and in the garb of a well-to-do Texan rancher.

His face was deeply scarred, as were also his neck and hands, from a severe burn, which had greatly disfigured him, for otherwise he would have been a very handsome man.

Now, as he rode along he looked the picture of despair, and low moans that broke from his lips showed that he suffered great anguish.

At last he reached a clump of timber, and almost fell from his horse in his eagerness to drink from a cool, crystal spring, the waters of which bubbled up before him most temptingly.

He took a long draught, and seemed much refreshed thereby.

Then he tore open his shirt-front, revealing an ugly wound in his side.

Tying his handkerchief saturated with water upon this, he tried to stop the steady flow of the life-current which was ebbing away.

"I must go on; yes, I must go on, if I expect to reach my home to see my child once more."

"Come, my good horse! an hour's rest has refreshed you, and you must struggle on to Cliff Canyon, for there my brave cowboys await me."

"Let me but reach them, and I will be content."

So saying, he arose with difficulty and sought to mount his horse.

But in vain; he was too weak to accomplish the task.

Again and again he tried to get into his saddle, but all in vain.

He could find nothing to mount upon, and thus aided he able to reach the saddle.

At last utterly worn out he sunk down upon the ground.

"My God! I am not strong enough to mount, and this must be the end."

"Yes, I must die here, alone, and carry my secret of where we buried the gold to the grave with me."

"My God! this is fearful!"

"Thank Heaven though, urged by that brave fellow, Dashing Charlie, we hid away the gold before the outlaws overtook us, and thus foiled Muello, the Mexican, and his band when they attacked us in camp last night."

"Poor Rifle Ben! He died fighting bravely for me; but, alas! his courage was of no avail, and when I saw that my men were overpowered, then I fled, wounded and wretched."

"Well, this is the end, and my loved child will lose her fortune unless I can get to her some word."

"Rifle Ben and I alone know its hiding-place, but he is dead and I am dying!"

"Come, good horse, you know the trail home, long as it is."

"It will lead you through Cliff Canyon, and there a party of my cowboys await, and they will come to my aid if they see you."

"Come, good, noble comrade, be my courier and take them news of me!"

He took from his pocket as he spoke a pencil and piece of paper, upon which he wrote a few lines.

The paper was tied with a piece of lariat around the neck of his horse, which was then stripped of his bridle and saddle after the wounded ranchero had again tried to mount and failed.

"It is of no use, for I am too weak. I must die here, unless you bring me aid, my dumb brute friend. Now go!"

As he spoke he gave the horse a slap and the intelligent animal, seeming to understand what was intended of him, started off at a trot.

Out of the timber he went, off across the prairie, and thence on out of sight of the man so eagerly watching him.

Then the ranchero sunk down upon the ground, took another draught of the cool water of the spring, and sunk into an uneasy slumber.

It was just twilight when he was awakened by voices, and there, gazing upon him, stood a splendid specimen of the Texas Ranger, with four others at his back.

"Texas Charlie!" gasped the ranchero.

"Yes, Captain Markham, I am Texas Charlie. I went to your ranch, as directed by Dashing Charlie Emmett, and Mustang Walter and a number of his cowboys are back at Cliff Canyon awaiting your coming, while I came on ahead to reconnoiter."

"And my daughter, is she well?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and is at the canyon along with the cowboys, for she would not come along."

"God bless her!" was the joyous reply.

"She's a plucky little lady, sir; but we saw your horse and hastened on. You are in bad shape, I see?"

"Yes, Muello's men overtook us, wiped out my brave followers, and—"

"Captured the gold?"

"No; that is safe, but I barely escaped with my life—in fact, I am fatally wounded, Texas Charlie; I know it, I feel it!"

"I hope not so bad as that, sir; but we will make a litter and get you along homeward as quickly as possible," and fifteen minutes after four cowboys were bearing the dying ranchero homeward.

CHAPTER V.

THE COLONEL'S WARD.

SOME two days' journey from Valley Camps in the gold-mining country of New Mexico, was situated, at the time the incidents of this story occur, Fort Blank, the headquarters of the colonel commanding that military district.

Fort Blank was a charming post, where there were stationed the three arms of the service, cavalry, artillery and infantry, with a settlement of a hundred souls surrounding it.

There were many others about the fort also, with stores, a blacksmith and wagon shop, and large herds of Government cattle, over which were half a dozen cowboy guards, so that altogether the colonel commanding had a surveillance over more than fifteen hundred souls.

There were officers stationed there also with their families, so that the society of Fort Blank was most charming.

The colonel commanding was a man with a history.

He had in his younger life had the misfortune of being forced into a duel with his best friend, and the result was fatal, so that he left his old home in Virginia, relinquishing kindred, friends and a fortune, and went forth in the world to work out his own destiny as best suited his humor.

Enlisting in the army as a private soldier, Gabriel Buckner had quickly made a name for himself, soon wearing the stripes of a corporal upon his arm, with those of a sergeant following without much delay.

A splendid-looking man, daring to recklessness, a perfect horseman, a fine shot and swordsman, while he had been educated abroad, he became the idol of his company and his officers were his warmest friends.

Saving several lives at the risk of his own, he had been made a second lieutenant, and from that day on his success was assured.

So it was at the age of forty Colonel Gabriel Buckner was the commandant of the Fort Blank District, and the most popular man in the army.

He was a bachelor still, for it was said that he had never ceased to love the maiden for whom he had placed his best friend in his grave.

Seated in his commodious and comfortable quarters, for Colonel Buckner loved his ease at home, though he would share the hardships of his men when in the field, he was told that a strange scout had come to the fort to see him.

"Send him here at once, for I am expecting news from Texas," he said to the orderly, who vanished, to soon report, accompanied by a man clad in buckskin, about the medium size and possessing a wiry, well-knit frame.

He had a pleasant, fearless face and wore his hair long, while he was armed most thoroughly.

"Well, sir, may I ask who my visitor is?" said the colonel politely, as he eyed the stranger from head to foot.

"I hesitated to tell you, Colonel Buckner, to see if you would recognize me, sir."

"Then we have met before?"

"Yes, sir, but I was a mere boy then, and you were an army lieutenant stationed on the Rio Grande in Texas."

"You saved me from being killed, sir, by a herd of cattle, risking your own life to do so."

"Ah, I recall you now, my young friend. You are the one we knew at the fort as little Charlie Bigelow," and the colonel extended his hand in his cordial way.

"Yes, sir, and known now as Texas Charlie, scout, guide, and interpreter."

"Ah! I have often heard of Texas Charlie and his gallant deeds, and am glad to meet you again."

"Now tell me how I can serve you."

"I am the bearer of a letter to you, sir, from Miss Beatrice Markham."

"Ah! and her father, Richard Markham?"

"I am very sorry to tell you, Colonel Buckner, that he is dead."

"Dead? Poor Richard!"

"But, when did this happen, may I ask?"

"He started for home with his brother's gold, sir, was overtaken and attacked on the trail by Muello and his gang, and he died from his wounds received, after we got him home."

"This is indeed sad; but what of Dashing Charlie Emmett?"

"He left him the day before, sir, to return to his station at Valley Camps."

"So escaped?"

"Yes, sir."

"And poor Richard Markham lost his life guarding that gold?"

"Yes, sir."

"I feel deeply his loss, for when he came on to see his brother die, Dashing Charlie having been his guide there, he visited me for several days here at the fort. He then seemed to have

a presentiment of evil to come, and made me promise to become his daughter's protector.

"His wife was my half-sister, whom I loved most fondly; but I cut away from old associations and kindred when quite young, so never saw more of them until Richard Markham visited me here, a few weeks ago.

"And now he is dead?"

"Yes, sir, and here is a letter from his daughter, which I promised to deliver to you, sir."

"I thank you," and taking the letter, the colonel broke the seal and read half-aloud as follows:

"RANGER'S REST RANCH, TEXAS.
June 1st, 18—.

"MY DEAR UNCLE:—

"It seems strange that my first letter to you should be one of ill tidings, for I write to tell you that my poor dear father is dead, and I am alone in the world.

"The particulars of his passing away. Texas Charlie, who hands you this, can tell you better than I.

"It was the wish of my father that I was to become your ward, and so I write to tell you that if you care to be annoyed by a young girl in your household, I am ready to come to you two months from the date of my letter, by which time I will have arranged affairs at the ranch, and be able to leave all in competent hands, for, as father may have told you, the place and its belongings are of considerable value.

"Hoping that you will not find me a trouble upon your hands, believe me, my dear uncle,

"Affectionately yours,

"BEATRICE MARKHAM"

"P. S.—I forgot to tell you that the gold, left me by my uncle, father was compelled to hide on the way to Texas, and it was not afterward sent for."

"I will gladly welcome my niece, Texas Charlie, as I would an own daughter, and do all in my power to make her life a happy one.

"Her mother was saved from a burning mansion one night by Richard Markham, who, with a number of other men, was visiting there during the Christmas holidays.

"Markham protected her from injury, but was terribly burned himself, and she afterward married him, and this is their only child, an orphan now, for her mother died some years ago.

"But, do you return to Texas?"

"Not now, sir, unless you require it, for I am at present working a mine in New Mexico."

"Ah! then on your way back bear for me a letter to Dashing Charlie?"

"I will be glad to do so, sir, for I shall pass his way," was the answer, and Texas Charlie was sent to pleasant quarters during his stay at the fort, while the colonel was left alone to ponder over his new position as the guardian of a ward, who was young, beautiful, and an heiress.

CHAPTER VI.

A TEXAN MAIDEN.

BEATRICE MARKHAM was just seventeen when she found herself an orphan and left alone in the world.

Before he had passed away, while lying upon his bed of suffering at home, the ranchero had told his daughter much of Colonel Gabriel Buckner, and how warmly he had been welcomed upon his visit to the fort.

He had said that she would find one who would be a father to her, while in the colonel's aide-de-camp, handsome, dashing young Fred Gibbs, also a distant relative of hers, she would find one who was the soul of honor, and he would be as a brother to her.

So it was that Beatrice was prepared to like both her uncle and her cousin, though she felt in her grief that no one would ever be able to take the place of her noble father in her heart, for he had been all in all to her.

Ranger's Rest was a large ranch, on which were large herds of fine cattle and many droves of horses.

The cabin home, though built of logs, was so large that it looked like a stockade-fort at a distance, and with the negroes brought from the old family home in Virginia to do the work of the place, it was a most hospitable and delightful retreat, even though situated upon the outline of Borderland.

There were a score of daring, trusty cowboys connected with the ranch, under their captain, Mustang Walter, and they were devoted to the ranchero and Beatrice.

With a governess for years to teach her, Beatrice had received a fine education, for her father was also a classical scholar and was wont to spend hours each day in instructing her, while he did not neglect her outdoor training, such as riding, driving and shooting.

She could lasso a running horse with any cowboy, and was an acknowledged dead-shot with both revolver and rifle, so that, with her musical accomplishments added, and her noble, lovable nature, Beatrice Markham was a maiden to win the hearts of all with whom she came in contact.

With this introduction of my Texan maid, who is to be the heroine of my romance of the frontier, I will go on to tell of the coming for her of Lieutenant Fred Gibbs, her cousin and the colonel's aide-de-camp.

She had settled up her father's affairs thoroughly, had placed Mustang Walter in charge of

the ranch, and left the faithful negroes to look after the house, when one afternoon, across the prairie, a party of several horsemen were seen approaching.

As they drew nearer they were discovered to be soldiers, six in number.

One of these was a man in buckskin, evidently a guide. Then came a young officer, with four cavalymen following him.

"It is my escort from the fort, and I am all ready to go," said Beatrice, as she gazed at the party through a field-glass.

It was her escort, and her cousin, Lieutenant Fred Gibbs, whom she had never met, was the officer in charge.

She saw in him her *beau ideal* of a soldier, tall, splendidly formed, graceful, and possessing a face full of manliness and daring.

He beheld in her his ideal of a perfect woman, and the two met as old friends might meet, he with a few words of real sympathy for her affliction in the death of her father, several months before, and saying that she was going to a new father now, while he would be as a brother to her.

The escort passed two days at the ranch to rest their horses, for it was a ride of days going back, and then the start was made.

Several well-laden pack-horses carried the wardrobe of Beatrice, and a small tent for her comfort in camp, while she was to be accompanied by her quadroom maid, Jophine, who was as full of pluck as her young mistress, and eager to accompany her upon the long and dangerous trail.

With the soldiers, the guide, Beatrice and her maid, and the pack-horses, the party formed quite a cavalcade as they rode away from the ranch, escorted for several miles upon their way by Mustang Walter and his brave cowboys.

When the ranch at last disappeared from view, and Mustang Walter and his men had said farewell, Beatrice felt that she had severed her connection with the happy past and stepped across the threshold of a new life, and bitter tears of grief rolled down her cheeks as she rode along, not daring to trust herself to speak or look back at the band of cowboys who were waving their hats and cheering to the last.

The first night on the trail was a pleasant one, Jophine cooked an excellent supper, the soldiers played and sung for her, and the new life began to open cheerily for the lovely orphan girl.

The trail was one of great danger, for there were Indians to avoid in the lower country, while the Mountain Marauders were to be feared as they neared the fort.

But the guide was a good one and knew the country as well as he did the red-skins, while Lieutenant Gibbs had picked as his escort four of the best men in Fort Blank.

And so on they went until the fort was not far away, for Lieutenant Gibbs had remarked:

"In three hours more, cousin Beatrice, you will meet your new father."

Just then the guide halted, and, as he did so, the young officer saw by his manner that something was going wrong.

"Well, guide, what is it?"

"We are in a trap, sir, for the Mountain Marauders have got us corraled," was the startling response.

CHAPTER VII.

MUELLO, THE OUTLAW.

THE man who was checked in his pursuit of the gold-train by Dashing Charlie's bold stand, if only for a short while, soon made up his mind that he had but one to deal with, and so proceeded to advance in the only way that could put the scout to flight.

He did not care to follow Dashing Charlie far when he saw that the fleetest horses of his band were no match for the roan, and then, too, he was anxious to overtake the gold-train, which he now felt assured would soon fall into his hands.

This he did do, and though the mules were there with their pack-saddles, after a hot fight in which the brave defenders were wiped out, there was found no gold.

The pack-saddles were filled with rocks, not gold.

This convinced Muello, the Mexican, that he had made a mistake in killing the men and allowing Captain Markham to escape, for he knew that the treasure had been hidden somewhere, and thus he could force no one to tell him where.

He could, however, only wait until morning, and then take the trail of the Texan, capture him, and wring from him the secret of where he had hidden his gold.

But a sharp shower fell in the night, and it washed away the trail of the escaping ranchero, who was thus saved from being tortured to death, for Muello, the Mexican, had no mercy in his heart for any man.

Foiled in his attempt to get possession of the gold, the outlaw chief returned to his ranging-ground in the mountains.

He was in a very ugly mood, and regarded

Dashing Charlie as the one who had thwarted him.

If the gold had been buried, then it was at the instigation of Dashing Charlie, who had aided in hiding it before he turned back.

Charlie Emmett then was the man to capture, and if torture could force the secret from him then it would surely be done.

But, Muello also wished to know about the ranchero who had escaped him, and if he had, after all, instead of hiding the gold, sent it by some other way to Texas than by the pack-mules he had had with him.

To discover this a spy of the outlaw band had been sent to Texas to return with a full report of the situation, and Muello was to await his return before taking steps against Dashing Charlie, for he knew it would be no easy task to capture the scout, and having done so, a harder task to force from him the secret he would know.

Muello had no especial retreat, though a dozen camping-places, all of them in the recesses of the mountains.

He lived in tents, as soldiers, carried his luggage on pack-mules, and would often be in a different camp each night, thus avoiding all attempts at pursuit.

The stage-trails, wagon-trains and travelers afoot and on horseback were his game and prey, with occasional raids into the settlements and mining-camps for plunder and supplies.

Thus it was a case of "here to-day and gone to-morrow," and to find him was almost impossible.

Some days after the return of Dashing Charlie to the burned cabin of Matt Markham, the miner, a horseman rode up to the little isolated hut which was the home of Hunter Dave.

That worthy was smoking his pipe before his door when he saw the horseman coming, and recognizing him arose and spoke with marked respect:

"Well, captain, back again, I see?"

"Yes, Hunter Dave, and our trip was a useless one."

"What, didn't git ther gold?" cried Hunter Dave in a scared kind of way.

"No, we were out-generated."

"Didn't catch 'em?"

"Oh, yes; but Charlie Emmett had laid a plan to thwart me and did so."

"That's awful, cap'n; but Dashing Charlie didn't go far?"

"You know this?"

"He's back ag'in, and has tuk up his home in the cavern near old Matt Markham's burnt cabin."

"Did you post the placards I told you to put up?"

"Yas, cap'n, and it's like pouring water on a duck's back ter warn him."

"And he is there now?"

"He be for sart'in."

"Then he intends to remain?"

"It looks thet way, and I kinder think thet ther gold may not have been sent arter all, that it was a kind of blind, and he is keeping watch until it can be sneaked away, some night."

"Hunter Dave, I believe you are right; yes, that must be the way of it after all."

"What makes ther scout have 'is home thar if it isn't, cap'n, for he lived at the tavern in the camps afore."

"You are right, Hunter Dave; but I have sent a spy to Markham's ranch in Texas, and I will soon know, and then act with my eyes open."

"In the mean time, you keep a close watch on Dashing Charlie, and report to me any strange movement upon his part."

"I will, cap'n."

"Have you heard anything of this Double of his?"

"I has not, and I don't believe there is such a man."

"I do, but I cannot trace who he is, although I have really seen him."

"You have seen Dashing Charlie's Double, cap'n?" asked Dave, with surprise.

"Yes, and talked with him, too. But now, I must be off," and the outlaw chief rode back into the mountains.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPY.

MUELLO, the Mexican, was a man whom not even his own band knew. They saw in him an utterly fearless leader, a person of fine presence, graceful and courtly in his manners, a splendid though reckless rider and fighter, cunning as an Indian, and as strict as a trained soldier in discipline.

He dressed in a suit of black, top-boots and sable sombrero, and his face was closely masked with a shield that fitted it perfectly.

Not one of his men had ever seen him unmasked, and what his face was in features not one of them could guess.

He had come upon the trails as a solitary-mounted robber. Miners first became his victims; then he grew bolder and halted the coaches.

One day he met more than his match in a coach full of passengers, but two of them came

promptly to his aid, being themselves outlaws, and saved him from capture or death, while they also aided in the robbery of the coach.

These two left the coach with Muello, and this was the starting of his outlaw band, known as the "Black Bandits," on account of their dress, the "Mountain Marauders," and by other names.

In time the band grew to over a score in number, and were feared far and wide, for they eluded all attempts of the Vigilantes to capture them, and also the soldiers were unable to corral them.

It was said that Muello was a Mexican, an army officer in disguise, a miner, and a scout, in fact no one knew who or what he was.

It was also reported that he visited the camps and forts at will, had spies in all of them, and knew of the movements of rich trains, or well-laden coaches as soon as it was possible to make the discovery.

After his unsuccessful attempt to capture the Markham gold, Muello was not heard of again for weeks. His men were not seen, and it was hoped that he had left the country.

But, instead, he was simply biding his time, and, through his spies, watching for an opportunity to strike a blow.

Seated in front of his tent one afternoon, with his men camped not far distant, and all appearing to have nothing to do but idle away their time, a horseman was seen advancing up the valley.

"It is my man," said the chief, as he turned his glass upon him.

"Now I will know all about that gold, whether it went to Texas or is still hidden near the old miner's cabin and has Dashing Charlie for a guard."

The horse and man were soon in camp, and both looked travel-worn and jaded.

"Well, Jubal, you are back again?"

"Yes, chief, and it was a long, hard ride, I can tell you."

"I do not doubt it; but sit down there and tell me if you went to the ranch?"

"I did, chief."

"Markham's?"

"Yes; the Ranger's Rest Ranch of Richard Markham, chief."

"And he is there?"

"He is."

"Well?"

"And will stay there."

"Ah! then he got his gold?"

"He is where he does not care for gold, where he does not fear that thieves may break through and steal, chief."

"This means that he is dead?"

"He is dead, señor."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, señor; he died the day before I reached the ranch."

"What was the matter?"

"Bullet-fever."

"What! some one killed him?"

"It was the wound he received when you attacked his camp, chief."

"Tell me all you know about it, Jubal, for I am most anxious to know, I assure you."

"Well, chief, I made up my pack, and went to Santa Fé and laid in a supply of goods."

"I got through the Indian country without much trouble, and arrived at the Texan's ranch to find that he was dying."

"Dying?"

"Yes, chief; he had been wounded by the attack on his camp, but had his cowboys at Cliff Canyon to meet him, and so escaped and was carried home."

"But he gradually failed, and died just after my arrival."

"His daughter was in great distress, but I played sick and asked to stop a few days, and permission was given me to do so, for they never turn any man from the door in that country."

"I was so sympathetic that I won the confidence of them all, for I gave little presents to the negroes about the house, others to the cowboys, and had some quack medicines which they all admitted were excellent."

"So it was I worked my way into the confidence of all, the pretty daughter in particular, and the result was I learned the exact situation of affairs."

"Well, what is the situation, Jubal?"

"The girl is to be adopted by her uncle."

"Who?"

"Colonel Buckner, of Fort Blahk."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, sir."

"I heard something of this, but hardly believed it to be true."

"Colonel Buckner is her guardian, and his aide, Lieutenant Gibbs, one of our most persistent foes, is a cousin of hers, and he is to come at a certain time to escort her to the fort, where she is to live."

"When?"

"I could not get the exact date, chief, but it will be in a month or two."

"Then a watch must be kept for his going, so as to capture them on their return, for that gold I will get by making the girl a prisoner, and holding her until it is given up."

"The gold was buried upon the trail, sir, before Dashing Charlie left the party."

"Ah! then it is by no means lost to us, Jubal, mark my words, for have it I will," was the determined response of the outlaw captain.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEN OF DESTINY.

THE Den of Destiny in Valley Mines was a place where the miners were wont most to congregate.

The grave, the gay, the good, the bad, the rich, the poor, the drunkard and the temperance man were all to be found there by day and night, though the idlers were the ones who frequented the place in daylight, the busy ones being in their mines then at work.

"The Den," as it was more familiarly called, was nothing more than a log shanty of giant proportions, built in the shape of a cross, with a dirt floor only, and dozens of rough tables scattered about for card-players.

There was one long table for readers, and on it were the files of the papers that found their way to the mines.

At one end of the saloon there was a bar with some pretensions to what the miners out there considered grandeur.

The whole was presided over by Poker Paul, a free-and-easy sort of fellow, who knew not the word fear, and ran his place according to his own notions.

He was popular with all, was liberal, and saw a fortune coming to him through his gambling and drinking-saloon, if he only had the patience to wait a while longer, and did not get killed meanwhile, either on purpose or by accident in one of the numerous "shooting picnics" that the miners were wont to indulge in, for reason and without, at times.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, you are back again, I see," said Poker Paul, one night, as the scout entered the Den of Destiny and stood glancing about him.

"Yes, Poker Paul, I have been back several days," was the answer.

"Strange I have not seen you."

"I'm not stopping at the hotel now, but up in the mountains; but have you seen Doctor Quick or Racket Rob in to-night?"

"Yes, they are both over in the left wing," and Poker Paul pointed to one arm of the cross-shaped building.

Thither the scout went, and at a table saw two men.

One of them had a ministerial look, for he was dressed in black, wore spectacles, and had a serious-looking face.

This was Doctor Zekiel Quick, better known as "Old Rhubarb," and the physician of the camps, who had come to make gold by mining, but found that his profession panned out far more liberally for him.

The other was a man who was known as Racket Rob, who, whenever he got a stake, would go on a spree and spend it all.

Of late these two men had become fast friends, the doctor having taken good care of a wound received by Racket Rob and which nearly lost him his arm.

At the time the scout approached they were talking of him, for he distinctly heard his name spoken.

"Ah, gentlemen, talking of me, I see—well, you know the old saying, to speak of the devil and his imps will appear."

Both men looked up in a startled kind of way, while Racket Rob dropped his hand in the neighborhood of his revolver, seeing which the scout continued:

"Don't do it, Racket Rob, for I am not bent on war this time, but pleasure."

"The fact is, I would like to play a game of cards with you."

"Then you have concluded to play, have you?—for I know that it was not your custom, though I played with your Double several times, and he cheated me, too, by paying his losses in counterfeit money."

"Well, doctor, I have nothing to do with the man who is pleased to play the part of my Double; but come, will you play?"

"I will."

"Name your stakes."

"Call it a hundred on a game."

"All right, just give me change for a five-hundred-dollar-bill, for I have nothing smaller."

"I'll do it, but I'd hate to take it from your Double, for he deals in counterfeit money."

"As I told you, I have nothing to do with him."

The bill was handed over and the doctor broke it with notes from a roll he took from his pocket, for he always went well supplied with money.

As the game progressed Racket Rob, who was earnestly looking on, said:

"I say, Pard Dashing Charlie, you seem awful friendly with us to-night, and to-morrow may be on the war-trail after us."

"What's the cause o' your love-feast now?"

"Oh, nothing more than I felt like a game of cards with Doc here."

"Say, Doc, you are a winner, that game."

"Yes, and I'll have my luck stick too, I'm thinking."

"Maybe so," was the scout's answer.

And thus the games continued until the doctor had won five times.

"Here, Doc, I'll pay you in another five hundred, for I need the small money you gave me," said the scout, handing over another five-hundred-dollar-bill, just as a man walked up to the table and asked quickly:

"Well, Dashing Charlie, how did you get here ahead of me?"

The scout started, but said quietly:

"What do you mean, Remsen?"

"I mean that I met you at your lay-out an hour ago, and you said nothing of coming here, while, as I lost no time in getting here, how could you come in ahead, I should like to know?"

"I have been here for some time, Remsen, so the man you met was not me, but my Double, and as you say he was at my shanty I will go and meet him, as I am anxious to see that gentleman—good-night, pards," and the scout hastily left the saloon.

But hardly had he been gone ten minutes when in came again either Dashing Charlie or his counterfeit.

CHAPTER X.

THE DOUBLE.

THOSE who saw the scout, as they supposed, reappear after having just left the saloon to hunt up his Double, after a second glance, seemed to feel that there was some change in him.

They were sure that there was when he walked up to Remsen and said:

"Well, Remsen, I concluded after all that I would come, so tried to overtake you."

"You must have ridden very fast."

A hush fell upon all in the saloon.

Those present were wondering at two things.

They wondered if the man before them was Dashing Charlie, or was it the man who had just left the place.

The doctor looked uneasy, and Racket Rob muttered:

"Doc, I thinks you has been done up."

Then Remsen spoke up, and his every word was distinctly heard:

"See here, Dashing Charlie, Hunter Dave told me to-day that you had returned to Valley Camps last night, and had taken up your quarters at the cave where Miner Markham used to live."

"Yes."

"Well, I rode up to see you to-night."

"I know that you did, and I appreciated your visit, Remsen."

"Now I wish to know whether it was you that I saw."

"Why, of course."

"You are sure it was not your Double?"

"Very sure."

"Well, I am in doubt."

"What do you wish me to understand by that?"

"Did you not leave this saloon a quarter of an hour ago?"

"Not I."

"Sure?"

"Why, I just came five minutes ago."

"Did you not play a game of cards with me, or rather five games?" asked the doctor, anxiously.

"You have doubtless heard, Doctor Quick, that I never play cards, and should I do so I would be most particular to select a gentleman for my adversary," were Dashing Charlie's cutting words.

"Hear that, Doc! Dashing Charlie says you is no gent," said a voice in the crowd.

"I wish to know if you are, or are not, Dashing Charlie?" the doctor demanded, excitedly.

"I am Charles E. Emmett, known here as Dashing Charlie, the White Scalper," was the prompt and decisive response of the man.

"See here, pard: I am also interested, and I assure you that I will find out if you be Dashing Charlie or his Double, for when I came in here a short while since you had just finished playing cards with Old Rhubarb here, you or your exact counterpart?"

And Remsen seemed very much in earnest.

"Can that be so?"

And the scout seemed worried for a moment, while Remsen went on to say:

"Now I know that the man I visited in the cave was Dashing Charlie, so prove that you are that man by telling me what occurred there."

"With pleasure, Remsen. You asked me when I returned from Texas, whither I had started with Mr. Richard Markham, and told me that you had a lot of goods coming by an extra coach over the trail which you were very anxious about, and asked me to—"

"Enough! you are Dashing Charlie, and I'll swear to it!" was the decided response.

"Now let me understand about this Double of mine, please."

All were most attentive now, for they were convinced that they had seen the exact double of the man before them.

"What would you know?"

"Just this: how long ago was this man here?"

"Some twenty minutes ago."

"He looked like me?"

"Was your exact image."
 "Played cards here?"
 "With me, yes," the doctor chipped in.
 "Who won?"
 "I did."
 "Have you your winnings?"
 "I have."
 "Will you let me see your money?"
 "Yes."
 And the doctor handed over his five-hundred-dollar bill.
 "This is what he paid you, sir?"
 "Yes."
 "This money is not good."
 "What!" yelled the doctor, his face turning deathly pale.
 "I say this bill is a counterfeit."
 "Oh, Lord! and this one?"
 And the doctor thrust forward the other bank-note of large denomination.
 "I got this from you—"
 "What?"
 "From that Double of yours, for I changed it for him."

"Then you are out five hundred dollars, and he cheated you for as much more, for both of the bills are counterfeits."

The doctor groaned, and the crowd laughed, while a voice said:

"I say, Dashing Charlie, are you sure you hain't playing this double business to muddle folks?"

At once a silence fell upon all and every eye was turned upon the man who asked this bold question.

The scout simply turned toward him in the coolest manner possible and looked him over from head to feet.

He was a stoutly-framed man, whose appearance denoted great strength, while his movements were quick and nervous.

All knew him as a dangerous person, and he was called Light-house Harry from the fact that his nose was of enormous size and of crimson hue.

That same nose had gotten him into many a scrape, in which he generally came out on top, for he was like a flash on the draw and shoot, and his aim was deadly.

"You will retract those words, Light-house Harry, or never leave this place alive," was the calm response of Dashing Charlie to the man who had insulted him, and meant to do so.

"I retract nothin' I believes, so if you wants it a game of draw go ahead," answered the desperado, and he dropped his hand upon his revolver, while with cries of alarm the crowd shrunk away upon each side, leaving an open lane between the two men.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE DUEL.

LIGHT-HOUSE HARRY was a ruffian who had made all men fear him in Valley Mines.

He was, ordinarily, a quiet fellow, yet always appeared to enjoy getting into trouble, while he seemed to regard his nose with the greatest affection, as it had been the cause of his having a dozen or more duels.

He did not fight against the name it had won for him as Light-house Harry, but he did "take it up" if his nose was slandered in his presence.

Coming into the saloon and hearing the discussion about Dashing Charlie's Double he had remained silent until he saw a chance to precipitate a row, for he knew that the scout would resent his insult.

Well aware that the Double had appeared before, and swindled several people, and that Dashing Charlie himself had barely escaped being strung up by the mob for some of the acts of which his counterpart had been guilty, Light-house Harry had decided to "chip in" and have a row.

He knew all that Dashing Charlie was when a quarrel was forced upon him, though he never sought one; but he had that confidence in himself to feel that no man was his superior, and thus far it had been his good fortune never to meet his equal in strength, or dead-shot shooting.

This was the reason he had determined to make Dashing Charlie fight or back down, for he had a belief in his mind that he had the Double to deal with and not the original.

Had he been certain that it was the scout himself, then perhaps he would not have forced matters by an insult to him, notwithstanding his confidence in himself.

As the scout now uttered the words that showed it was to be war between them, the crowd rapidly fell aside, and, as quick as a flash, the two men were standing face to face, their weapons drawn and fingers upon the triggers.

"Do you retract your insulting words to me, Light-house Harry?" demanded Dashing Charlie, in the calmest of tones, as each man stood facing the other, their right hands hanging by their sides and grasping a revolver.

"I hain't the man to retract, Dashing Charlie, when says what I believes," came the equally calm answer.

The crowd stood breathlessly gazing upon the

men. All could see that each seemed to hold an equal chance, since to raise the revolvers hanging by their sides and open fire would be but a half-second's work.

Each had his weapon cocked, with finger on the trigger.

Their eyes met and were ready to catch the slightest movement.

The suspense was intense, the deathlike silence impressive.

"I will give you just half a minute to retract your words, Light-house Harry, for I do not wish to kill you."

"I'll not back down, so try it on."

"You shall have your half-minute to consider."

And with his left hand Dashing Charlie took out a handsome gold watch and glanced at the face.

"It is now ten o'clock to the second—just half a minute later you die!"

"I'll have comp'ny on the death-trail, Dashing Charlie," was the undaunted answer.

But Charlie Emmett appeared not to hear him, for his eyes were cast downward toward the face of the watch, yet upon the watch they did not rest, for they were measuring the distance between his adversary and himself and the height of his hand holding the revolver from the floor.

The seconds passed like minutes, for the time seemed long indeed to the breathless lookers-on.

Such a duel was new in Valley Mines, and all present enjoyed it in speechless silence.

Without looking up Dashing Charlie said, in the same unmoved tone:

"The time is up. Do you retract?"

"Not me!"

No one remembered to have seen Dashing Charlie move a muscle, or even to glance at his foe, but from the revolver in his right hand came a flash without its being raised to a level, and the weapon held by Light-house Harry dropped to the floor as a cry of fury and pain commingled burst from the lips of the wounded miner.

Then, ere any one could speak, with a spring like a panther Dashing Charlie leaped to the side of his enemy, his hands grasped him in a grip of iron, and he was bent backward to the floor, while the words came in a hiss:

"Will you retract your words now, or shall I kill you?"

"I crawfishes! I retracts all, and loses no time about it," was the quick response.

Instantly Dashing Charlie released his hold upon him, picked up his revolver, and, thrusting it into the man's belt, said:

"Here, doctor, look after Light-house Harry's wounded hand, and send the bill to me."

A cheer greeted these words, while the wounded man held forth his left hand and said:

"You're a man every bit of you, Dashing Charlie, and I asks yer pardon."

"Granted with pleasure, pard," and Charlie Emmett grasped him by the left hand, while he added:

"I hope the bone is not broken."

"It is not, but it was a close call," the doctor announced.

"Yes, and I thanks yer for not taking my life; but, tell me how yer did it without raisin' yer gun?"

"Oh, it's a way I have of shooting from the hip. One gets perfect with practice,"* was the indifferent reply, and the scout added:

"Now I will go on the trail of my Double, for I must find him and square accounts," and he left the saloon, followed by a cheer from the crowd, in which Light-house Harry joined lustily, in spite of his wound.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE TOILS.

THE guide who had given the startling information to Lieutenant Fred Gibbs, that they were in a trap, set for them by the road-agents, had made the discovery by several "signs" he had seen happening in rapid succession.

One of these was a trail that covered their own, and there were the tracks of seven horses iron-shod.

Another was the finding of an arrow at a point where these trails branched off, and it pointed on the one they were traveling.

Another sign was the discovery, across the valley in some timber-land, the form of a horseman hastily seeking cover.

So, when asked by the lieutenant what had aroused his suspicions of a trap set by the outlaws, the guide had replied:

"Yer see, sir, thar is a trail o' seven mounted men behind us."

"There is an arrow pointing the way we is goin', and then over in the timber yonder is some horsemen, and that means an ambush."

"May they not be soldiers?"

"No, sir, for they would show themselves; besides, soldiers don't dress in black."

*The "hip-shot" is one often made by Dashing Charlie, and has also been made by Buffalo Bill, Doctor Frank Powell, Doctor Carver, and Frank J. Frayne, Jr., with both rifle and revolver.

"Ah! you saw enough to convince you that they are the Black Bravos?"

"I did, lieutenant, and so I come back to report."

"Well, I can make a dash through them, leaving Miss Markham with the pack-horses and one soldier."

"You will not leave Miss Markham in safety while her defenders face danger."

"Make your dash, and I will ride through with you, sir," was the plucky response of Beatrice.

"It would be risking too much, so we must take another plan."

"Why not flank them?" asked the young girl.

"That cannot be done here on account of the nature of the ground, I am sorry to say."

"Yas, miss, thar is no ridin' country on either side of here; but we can go back a mile and branch off at the right-hand trail, thus making a flank, though that trail may be guarded, too."

"Then the one to the left, guide?"

"Well, sir, I'm sart'in that is ambushed, too."

"Is there no trail branching off from the right-hand one?"

"Waal, there be one, only ther lady c'u'dn't go that way, for she c'u'dn't ride; would have ter lead her horse down a rocky slide, and them little feet w'u'd never stand up under it, and it w'u'd 'most kill her, too, if not quite."

"But, men can make it?" she asked.

"Yas, miss; but it's a terror of a trail ter take, even to the best of us tough ones."

"Never mind, I'll risk it," was her decisive announcement. "Take that trail!"

"Let me propose a plan miss, to the lieutenant?"

"Well, guide?"

"It's a ten-mile walk from here to the fort, and the walkin' is good, while the way I speaks of yer'd have ter hoof it nigh half that distance, and ride twenty miles as well, so it would be rough going from start ter finish."

"Yes."

"Now, my idee is that the horses all starts back on ther trail, branches off to ther right, and takes ther trail o' rocks I was a-speakin' of."

"And then, guide?"

"Waal, sir, arter waitin' fer yer ter come along and seein' yer don't, ther road-agents will come ter see what ther matter is, diskovert ther yer has turned back and will foller the back trail."

"They can't catch us, but ef they does catch up, it will turn inter a running fight."

"But you mean that Miss Markham and a couple of soldiers shall dismount, hide until the Black Bravos have gone in pursuit, believing all to be with the horses, and then walk to the fort?"

"I does, lieutenant, but you must go with the lady, and take a couple of yer men with yer, while ther yaller gal goes along with me and t'other soldier, so if seen it will be supposed she is ther lady. Does you understand the lay-out, lieutenant?"

"Yes, and I can think of no better plan, guide, though I dislike to divide the force, and also to have Miss Markham walk ten miles."

"Don't mind me, please, for I am used to hard exercise."

"She'd have a worse walk the other way, sir, and her little thin shoes wouldn't last a quarter of a mile."

"All right; let us at once act. You, Barney and Cross, remain with me; and guide, you will take charge of the other party."

"Yes, sir; and we'll git thar, I'm thinking."

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, don't let them kill you! You will save her sir, won't you?" cried Jophine, thinking more of her young mistress than herself.

"We will get through all right I think, Jophine."

"Now, guide, be off! and we will hide yonder among the rocks until the road-agents have passed back over the trail."

"Don't leave no trails, soldiers, with them big boots of yourn!" called out the guide, as he led the party back upon the trail.

Having pinned up her riding-skirt around her, Beatrice was ready for the tramp, and the four started for the rocks, the two soldiers following the lieutenant and the maiden.

They all took great care to leave no tracks, for they knew that there were skilled trailers among the outlaw band, men who could follow the faintest suggestion of a trail.

Going some two hundred yards from the trail, they found shelter among the rocks which were heaped up in the most chaotic manner.

A secure retreat was found for Beatrice, and then the lieutenant cut boughs and placed them between two rocks so that he could peer through and watch the trail.

He took up his position so that he could command a good view, while the boughs would shield him perfectly, and the two soldiers crouched just behind him.

Lieutenant Gibbs had his own hunting rifle with him, and knew well how to use it, while the soldiers were armed with carbines and revolvers.

Beatrice also carried a rifle as well as a revolver in her belt, and she too knew well how to use the weapons.

Thus they waited until more than an hour had passed, when Lieutenant Gibbs spoke:

"There they come!"

Coming up the trail they had been following, soon appeared in sight a horseman riding slowly along and regarding the ground attentively.

"It is Muello, the Mexican, himself," whispered the officer, watching him through his glass.

There came into sight six other horsemen riding in Indian-file and all clad in black.

The chief halted as he reached the spot where the guide had turned back, and calling his men around him, all began to examine the ground most attentively.

Then they dismounted and were most thorough in their search:

"Take a look at him, Cousin Beatrice," said Fred Gibbs, calling the young girl to him.

"What a splendid-looking man!" she cried.

"How do you know, for he wears a black mask?"

"True, but I refer to his bearing, his splendid form, and I know he must have a handsome face."

"I hope to show it to you some day when I capture him."

"Yes, he deserves hanging, I am sure; but, they have made some discovery, for they appear excited."

"Yes, they have indeed made a discovery, and we will soon know what it is," was the answer of the officer, in a low tone.

The men were moving about quickly, pointing here and there upon the ground, as they read certain signs they saw there, and at last one of them pointed toward the rocks.

"Ah! they have found us, I fear," exclaimed Beatrice.

"Found us, yes, but not yet captured us! Stand ready, men! We are three and they but seven, but we must not be taken," sternly announced Lieutenant Gibbs.

"No, we must not be taken," and with the words the beautiful Texan placed herself by the side of the lieutenant and his two soldiers as they stood at bay among the rocks.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

AT there was to be a fight to the death between the outlaws and the fugitives among the rocks, not one of the latter for a moment doubted.

They held a position which was in their favor, for a steep and impassable cliff was in their rear, and thus they could not be flanked.

Then, too, the advance to dislodge them must be made in the face of the officer and his two men, not to speak of Beatrice, whose rifle was to be by no means despised.

The outlaws might outnumber them two to one, might succeed in reaching their position and capturing or killing them, but their victory would be a dearly-bought one, indeed.

So the young lieutenant stood at bay with grim determination to defend his position and his charge to the last.

He tried to urge Beatrice to seek a place of greater personal safety at the foot of the bluff in vain, for her reply was:

"I will not seek safety while those who defend me are in danger of death."

"Then, too, I can perhaps help put one or more of our foes out of the fight."

"No, lieutenant, I shall remain here at your side and do my duty!" she answered, decisively.

Lieutenant Gibbs admired her pluck, yet regretted her determination.

"Well, men, it is going to be a hard fight of it, but we will have the advantage from the start. Our first fire must bring down three of those human hounds!"

"Four!" corrected Beatrice.

"Ah, yes; pardon me for forgetting your rifle," he answered, with a smile.

Then he went on to make his plans known.

"I will take the chief, men, while you, Barney, drop that large fellow there talking to him."

"And my man, lieutenant?" queried the second soldier.

"Ah, yes, Cross; you take the fellow who appears to be the trailer of the band."

"I'll keep my eye on him, sir," answered Cross.

"And which one shall I take, Lieutenant Gibbs?" came the question, from Beatrice.

"Ah, yes, I beg pardon again, Cousin Beatrice. You take the little fellow over by that tree."

"All fire when I give the word, and that will put four of our foes out of the fight."

"It will be a surprise to them, and before the others can reach us we will, I hope, show them that we are not to be taken—at least by the force before us now," and the officer added his last words in a low tone, heard only by the two soldiers.

"Stand ready!" he ordered in a firm, low voice hardly above a whisper, as he saw the pursuers now moving toward the rocks.

"Remember whom you are to kill, and do not fire until I give the word."

The soldiers saluted in silence, while Beatrice said:

"I'll not forget my target."

The outlaws had been both grouped together and scattered during these preparations of the fugitives.

The trails near, had evidently warned them, for they had squarely turned back upon their advance, and it could mean only that the party the outlaws were pursuing had discovered danger ahead, or suspected it, and so had turned back to try and make a flank movement and thus avoid their foes.

After examining the trails still more closely, and just as the chief seemed about to lead his men upon the rocks, they were halted by one of the outlaws who had hung back with the horses.

Three paces more and four rifles would have rung out together, and Beatrice had decided that she would not be the one to miss.

She recalled how her father had been mortally wounded by these same villains, lingering long in greatest anguish, and how they had sought to kill and rob her miner uncle who had left her his fortune.

So it was that she felt callous to the thought of taking a human life, felt revengeful toward those who were so wicked, so merciless.

But, the call of the man with the horses caused the chief and the others under cover of the rifles to turn back, just in the nick of time to save their lives.

They went to where the horses were, and after a short parley mounted and rode on down the trail!

Brave as he was, Lieutenant Fred Gibbs gave a sigh of relief when he saw the act of the outlaws.

After all, they had decided, just as the guide had said, that the fugitives had gone back on their trail to try and escape by another way.

"Well, my cousin, they have gone," remarked the young officer, in evident satisfaction.

"True, and they ride away as leisurely as though they felt sure we would be headed off on the other trails," answered Beatrice.

"But the guide's plan has outwitted them, for he will escape by the secret way down the mountain, while we can now press on as fast as you can travel, cousin mine."

Beatrice expressed her willingness to go at once, and as she had her skirts to look after, one of the soldiers carried her rifle.

They set off at as rapid a walk as Lieutenant Gibbs dared allow Beatrice to go, and wound on down the trail into the valley.

They felt confident, now, of escape, or if the chief went back as far as the spot where they had seen the three trails branch off from the main one, he could not ride back and overhaul them, even though they were on foot.

"I am a fair runner, lieutenant; so if you are willing to let Cross carry my rifle and coat, I will start on ahead, sir, for the fort, and be able to send aid out to meet you."

"Well said, Barney, for you can make three three miles to our one. I will carry your rifle, giving Cross the coat; so start at once, my man!"

But, even as the words left the lips of the officer, there came the rattle of firearms, and Barney and Cross sunk in their tracks!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATAL FIRE.

THE party had begun to cross the valley when Barney made his offer to run on ahead for aid.

The soldier knew his powers, and felt certain he could reach the fort in an hour's time by hard work, while it would take nearly three hours for Beatrice to walk there.

Then, too, there was a point nearly two miles from the fort which, when he reached, he could fire a revolver and attract the attention of the sentinel, and aid would be rushed to him at once, thus saving considerable time, for whoever came would go right on at full speed to meet the officer on the trail.

Barney had planned well, but alas! none of them suspected that a foe was upon their trail, watching them from the time they began the descent of the hill into the valley.

That foe was in ambush, and remained unseen from the trail.

There were three men there, their horses being hitched back in the thickest of the timber.

A glance was sufficient to show that they were members of the Mountain Marauders' band, for they were dressed in black and their horses were of the same somber hue.

The faces of the men were evil and reckless, and as their victims drew near, they prepared for their murderous work.

"Waal, thar they comes sure as shootin', and ther chief hev missed them arter all," said one of the ugly-faced and uglier-hearted trio, as they caught sight of the soldiers and the maiden coming down the valley trail.

"How in thunder did they slip through ther chief's net?" asked another.

"I dunno, but the, has did it."

"Yas, and we rakes 'em in."

"Sart'in."

"Waal, ther chief were cunning ter leave us here and no mistake, for ef he hadn't they'd hev got through."

"Whar is ther rest of 'em, I wonders."

"Dunno, but maybe wiped out."

"And what's ter be did with these?"

"One of 'em is thet dandy young Lieutenant Gibbs, and he's a fighter from 'wayback."

"Yas, he's game from spur ter plume, and dead sart'in on ther aim, so don't git in range o' his bullits."

"No, for we dares not shoot him."

"Who says so?"

"I says so, for he knows ther secret about thet gold, and don't yer fergit it."

"No, he must not be hurted."

"Nor ther gal."

"No, indeed."

"But ther sogers?"

"Them is different."

"Shoot 'em!"

"Waal, ef we don't, then we gits hurted."

"I guesses you is right."

"Waal, you two draw bead on the sogers and pull trigger, while I covers ther loot'nent and calls ou' fer him ter hold up his hands."

"We has got him foul then, and he'll hev ter do as we says."

"Maybe so; but we kin work ther racket ter win."

Such was the plan of the three murderous plotters, and they arranged themselves in position to carry out their plot without failure.

And on came their victims, wholly unsuspecting danger, for they believed that Muello had left no men yet on the trail.

Nearer and nearer they came, until, when in range, Barney drew off his heavy cavalry-jacket and handed it to Cross.

The lieutenant had just grasped his carbine to carry it for him, when the two shots rung out that sent death to the hearts of the two brave soldiers.

Barney clutched at the revolver in his belt, half-drew it, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Cross staggered back as the bullet tore into his body, threw his hands upward, and, with a moan, sunk in a heap in the trail.

Quick as a flash Fred Gibbs sprang to one side, to place as much space as possible between himself and Beatrice in case other shots were fired, and his rifle was brought to his shoulder, leveled, and a bullet sent crashing into the timber where he had caught sight of a face.

A wild shriek followed the shot, while in loud voice came the words:

"Pards, I is done for—"

But he was broken in upon by a still louder voice, crying:

"Hands up, officer, or you and the gal will both be shot down, and there is plenty ag'in' yer."

"How many of you are there?" was the cool query, and Fred Gibbs was looking for another glimpse of a foe.

"There's five of us, now you has kilt our pard; so hands up! or we fires on ther gal as well as upon you, for we means biz, and don't you forget it."

"Oh, do not hesitate, Lieutenant Gibbs, for their work shows what they will do, though I do not, will not believe they would shoot me; but you, yes!" cried Beatrice, earnestly.

"I do not believe they have the force they say, or surely they would step out and face one man."

"Besides, there were but two shots fired just now," said the officer.

And he watched carefully for some movement that would give him a chance to fire.

"We has ther men, and you'll find it out if you don't surrender."

"Quick! is it hands up, or yer life?"

"Will you pledge yourselves to allow this lady to go on to the fort in safety, if I surrender to you?"

"We pledges nothin', unless it be ter kill you if yer don't obey orders."

"I'll surrender to you, if you will let this lady go on to the fort."

"No, we wants yer both, and if you values yer life jist raise them hands over yer head."

"I beg of you to obey them, Cousin Fred, for I feel they are merciless."

"If we can only gain time, for some one from the fort may—"

"Hands up, quick, for our fingers is on the triggers."

"Please obey, and save your life, for the guide will report our coming and help will be sent from the fort."

"Ther last call, officer!"

"Does yer surrender, or shall I give ther order ter fire?" cried the voice from ambush.

With a glance at the pleading face of Beatrice, Fred Gibbs answered sternly:

"I surrender."

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTIVES.

"You is wise, officer, to surrender, for we has ther dead-wood on you and no mistake."

"Now lay thet rifle at yer feet," ordered the

man in ambush, when he heard Fred Gibbs's words that he would surrender.

With an imprecation at his ill-fortune, Lieutenant Gibbs placed the rifle at his feet.

"Step back two paces now!"

The officer obeyed.

"Unbuckle yer belt and lay yer revolver and sword on ther ground!"

"This is terrible and—"

"Please do not hesitate, but obey," pleaded Beatrice.

The lieutenant did as the outlaw commanded.

"Now back ward march two paces—halt!"

This order was obeyed, and next followed the commands:

"Hands up over your head, and right-about face, officer!"

"I will not turn my back upon such a foe," was the savage response of the young soldier.

"Waal, we will jist cut ther pretty cheek o' thet gal with a bullet ter show yer we means jist what we says every time.

Quickly did Fred Gibbs obey this order when this threat was made against Beatrice.

He turned his back at once to his foe, for he could risk his own life, but no injury to the beautiful girl who was under his escort.

Then out of the thicket stepped one of the outlaws, to advance upon the lieutenant.

But quick as the lightning's flash he was covered by the rifle of Beatrice, while in a voice that there was no disputing was in deadly earnest she cried:

"Now, up with your hands, Sir Outlaw, for I have you covered!"

Lieutenant Gibbs was almost as much startled at the sudden command and act of Beatrice as was the outlaw whose heart her rifle covered.

He wheeled quickly and made a spring toward his own weapons, but halted as he heard the words:

"Don't be a fool, officer, and force us ter kill yer, for I hain't no loss if ther gal kills him."

"Alas! I believed that there were but two there, the one you killed and this one, so made an effort for freedom," said Beatrice with deepest regret as she lowered her rifle.

The outlaw thus taken by surprise had turned deadly pale, but now seeing that the quick wit of his friend had saved him, he burst forth into a rude laugh and said:

"Ef yer kilt me, leetle gal, it w'd take a five-shooter ter finish up the rest o' ther gang, and it's well yer didn't pull trigger on me, as thar is men in thet thicket thet hates wimmen and thinks no more o' killin' them than they w'd a wolf."

"Well, what is your pleasure, now that you have made us your prisoners?" asked Beatrice with the greatest coolness.

"Ter keep yer for ther chief; for he has ther say, seein' as he ordered yer corraled," and the man stepped forward and slipped a pair of steel handcuffs upon the wrists of the young officer, who fairly groined at this indignity, while he said:

"There will come a day of reckoning, my man, for this insult."

A rude laugh greeted his words, and then he called out:

"Have yer guns ready, pards, while I puts the bracelets upon ther pretty wildcat, for she is ready ter scratch and bite."

"What! would you put irons upon a lady?" indignantly asked Fred Gibbs.

"I would, the sartin', for she's dangerous as the hind hoofs o' a Government mule."

"She wears ther bracelets."

"I'll promise you to give up my weapons, and to make no trouble if you will not put irons upon me," said Beatrice.

"Better not put 'em on her, pard, ef she gives up her weapons and says she'll be good," said the other outlaw from his place of ambush.

"Waal, I'll compromise by telling you, I'll do it if yer gives any trouble, fer I is really afeerd o' yer I admits," and the outlaw added:

"Come, Pard Nick, and lend us a hand, for thers kin keep ther weapons coverin' ther gal."

The other outlaw now came up out of the thick timber.

"You are a pack of cowardly coyotes, with no mercy even for a young girl in your power," said Frederic Gibbs, indignantly.

"Hard names don't hurt us, officer, but bullets does."

"And ropes will."

"Waal, thet reminds us we is ruther too close to ther fort fer comfort, so we'll git."

"Come, pard, what does yer say about goin' on our way, for they kin ride our dead pard's horse?"

"Yes, but hain't we goin' ter bury our pard?"

"What's ther use, for he won't know it one way or t'other."

"No, pick him clean o' what he hev of value, and also ther sgers, and then leave 'em for ther coyotes."

"All right, you knows."

"And we doesn't wish to lose no more time than we hev ter do, nuther."

"That's so, pard."

With this the bodies of the dead soldiers were robbed of all they had of value about them, and

the comrade of the outlaws was served in the same way.

The outlaws then led up their horses, the animal of their dead comrade being intended for the two captives.

As Frederic Gibbs saw this his face grew black with rage.

"Where are the rest of your men?" he demanded.

"We is all that is here at present, officer, for you kilt our pard thar."

"If I had only known it, there would have been more dead bodies around, even if one was mine, for never would I have surrendered to two of your kind."

"Do not mind it, Cousin Fred, for we both supposed there was more— Oh, what is it?" and Beatrice turned quickly as she saw the two men spring out into the trail and look down it.

"It's all right, for it's our cap'n coming," responded one of the outlaws.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT HIS MERCY.

WHEN the outlaw chief rode away from his place of ambush in the timber, as has been seen, he left three of his men on duty.

He was a cunning man, and when the party he was waiting for did not come along on time, and he knew from the reports brought him they should have done so, he decided to look them up.

But he did not desert the ambush, for fear there might be a flank movement and his intended victims thus escape him.

He therefore left the three men who had halted Lieutenant Gibbs and his party.

Arriving at the rocks on the ridge, he saw where a halt had been made, and so he searched for signs which would explain just what the soldiers had done.

The guide had been wise in dismounting the lieutenant, Beatrice and two of the soldiers, for on foot their trail did not show; but had they stuck to the other path they might have gotten through, though with her light shoes Beatrice would no doubt have suffered greatly on the rocky trail.

The chief had not, nor had his men, suspected any such ruse as dismounting a part of the number, so the rocks had not been searched, the movement toward them being to examine the trails in the valley from that point of lookout where a grand view was obtainable.

Having continued on, the chief had gone several miles when he met one of his men coming toward him at a run.

"What is it, Dorgan?" he asked, as the man drew rein by his side.

"The party turned back upon the trail, and the guide has led them by the Bad Lands Ridge."

"They cannot carry horses that way."

"Yes, chief, they can, though it's dangerous work and all would have to walk for some miles to do so; but we saw them from our lookout on the north trail, and I came to report to you, sir."

"Curses! Where were they when you saw them?"

"Entering the Bad Lands, sir."

"How long ago?"

"Half an hour, sir."

"All of them?"

"There was a led horse, sir, with a lady's saddle on it, and three horses of soldiers."

"Hal! that means that there were some who went on to the fort on foot."

"Quick! after them with all speed, and kill or capture them, all but the lieutenant and the girl, for they must not be harmed."

"But I forget, those two must have walked on to the fort."

"Yes, they coolly saw us go by and then went on their way."

"But they have our ambush to go through, so will be halted."

"On, men, after the others while I return and catch the rest!"

With this the chief wheeled back upon the trail he had come, while his men rode away in chase of those who had gone by the way of the Bad Lands, as the rocky ridge and plain were called which the guide had taken.

The chief rode like the wind, and he was splendidly mounted.

He passed the rocks where his victims had been hidden, and for a moment examined the trails again.

"Ah! there are foot-tracks!"

"Two of large cavalry-boots, for here are the spur-marks in this soft dirt."

"Here is a smaller track and it is a man's."

"That is the track of Lieutenant Gibbs."

"Yes, and here is a track hardly as large as a twelve-year-old child's."

"It is shapely too, and confesses its owner to be Beatrice Markham, the heiress."

"Yes, I am on the right trail and I will catch them at my ambush, if those three scamps do their duty."

"If they let them pass then they shall suffer for it."

"They are three to three, and being in ambush gives them double the advantage."

"Now to see if they have allowed them to pass."

Again the chief rode on at the same mad speed as before.

Ere he had reached the valley he heard shots ahead, and deep into the flanks of his horse he sunk his spurs to urge him on still faster.

At last he saw a group ahead, in a thicket on the edge of some heavy timber.

"They are captives!"

"My men bagged them splendidly!" he cried.

And a moment after he rode up to the spot where all were grouped, crew rein suddenly and sprung to the ground.

He glanced over the party and read just how matters were.

One of his men lay there dead, two soldiers also, Lieutenant Gibbs was in irons, and Beatrice Markham securely bound.

"We has got 'em, cap'n!" said one of the outlaws, exultantly.

"So I see, my men, and you shall be well rewarded," was the answer.

Then he turned toward the officer and maiden who were regarding him with the deepest attention.

There before them was the man who had defied all his foes—whom no one knew, not even his men, for his face was always masked.

A splendid-looking specimen of manhood he seemed, one who looked the chief throughout, one whose manners were courtly and refined, yet who possessed a heart as savage as an Indian's against those who were his foes.

A man merciless to all when gold was to be gained.

And now into his hands had the heiress of Miner Markham fallen, and what mercy might she expect? she asked herself.

None!

And Lieutenant Gibbs?

None!

Such was Beatrice Gibbs's summing-up of the character of the outlaw chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OUTLAW'S DEMAND.

FOR more than a minute the chief had gazed at his captives, they at him, while the story of their capture had been told by the two outlaws, but he had not addressed a word to them.

Now he said, to Lieutenant Gibbs:

"So I have you at last in my power, sir."

"I did not know that you sought that honor, Sir Outlaw, before this occasion."

"Oh, yes; it was an honor I have long sought, for you have been my most persistent enemy."

"And justly so, for I am an officer of the army, you a murderer and highway thief," was the stinging reply.

"Be careful, sir, in the choice of your words to me."

"I always choose my words in addressing a villain."

"Have a care I warn you, for Muello the Mexican is no man to trifle with."

"Muello the Mexican is some American who is masquerading under an alias to hide from justice and the gallows."

The chief uttered a suppressed oath and said sharply:

"I will not stop to parley words with a man standing on the brink of the grave, so let us talk business."

"What business can we possibly have together?"

"I will explain."

"I await your explanation with patience, Sir Bandit."

"You are Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs?"

"I am."

"Aide-de-camp to Colonel Buckner at Fort Blank?"

"Yes."

"You were sent by Colonel Buckner to Texas to escort his niece, Miss Markham, from her home there to the fort?"

"I was."

"Miss Markham is the heiress of old Matt Markham the miner?"

"I believe so."

"Her fortune was in gold carried away by her father, guided by Dashing Charlie?"

"Of that fact Miss Markham might inform you if she wished, I suppose, but I would urge her to give you no information that did not interest you."

"But it does interest me."

"How so?"

"I want that fortune."

"Ah! you would rob a young girl, would you?"

"Oh, yes, I would rob and kill man, woman or child to gain my ends."

"Well, I believe it of you."

"But to this fortune?"

"What of it?"

"Dashing Charlie urged that young lady's father to hide that fortune on the trail, and when I overtook the gold train I found only rocks in the pack-saddles."

A peal of hearty laughter, in which Beatrice could not but join, broke from the lieutenant's lips at this.

"You seem to think it amusing?"

"I do, and I would have given a month's pay

to see you make the discovery that the gold had turned into rocks."

"It will prove a bitter discovery for you, unless you do as I order you."

"What have I to do with it?"

"This young lady is Miss Markham?"

"Oh, yes."

"She is the one who had the gold left to her?"

"I think so."

"Her father was killed?"

"He died of a wound received in an attack you made upon his camp, and some day I will have the chance to avenge him," was the impressive response of the young officer.

"You may, if you obey me as I demand."

"What are your demands?"

"Where is this gold?"

"I do not know."

"But you could find out?"

"No."

"I say you can."

"Pray tell me how?"

"Ranchero Markham buried this gold, as I said, but he did not die without making known to you where it was."

"I was not with him when he died."

"Then he left maps and papers of its hiding-place for you."

"Why should he?"

"You are related, I believe, to him in some way, and he left you in possession of the secret."

"He did nothing of the kind."

"I say he did."

"Prove it."

"I shall force you to tell that secret."

"You can drive a horse to water, outlaw, but you cannot force him to drink."

"I shall force you to tell where that gold is."

"Never!"

"I say you shall."

"I cannot tell what I do not know."

"Do you swear that you do not know?"

"I am not on a witness-bench before an honorable judge, so I refuse to answer."

"I shall see, once I have you under torture, if you will not change your tune."

"I do not know; and I tell you the truth when I say so."

"If you did?"

"What then?"

"You would refuse to tell?"

"Most assuredly would I."

"You would still keep your secret?"

"If I knew, yes, I would die before I divulged the secret thus intrusted to me."

"When the iron enters your soul, you will change your decision, I am sure."

"Try me."

"I will—"

"Men, throw a lariat around this gentleman's neck, and the other end over that drooping limb."

And the outlaw pointed to the large limb of a tree near by.

"The other end," he continued, in the same deliberate tone, "make fast to my saddle-horn, and when I give the word, lead my horse forward so as to suspend the gentleman in mid-air."

"Does yer mean it, chief?" asked one of the men, who saw in the hanging of the officer the destroying of the secret of where the treasure was buried.

"What! do you dare to question me?" and the chief's voice had a threatening ring which frightened the two men, for they quickly sprang to obey his command, while for the first time Beatrice spoke.

"Ah, sir, I beg you not to commit a crime so heinous, for indeed Lieutenant Gibbs does not know where the gold is hidden."

"Do you know?" and the chief turned quickly upon the young girl.

"I do not."

"Young ladies should not tell falsehoods."

"This to me?"

"Take that, sir, and that!" and quick as a flash the riding-whip of Beatrice cut keenly across the masked face of the outlaw chief.

"By Heaven, girl, but you strike a stinging blow with that little hand of yours."

"You are too dangerous to be allowed to go free, so tie her, men, with a lariat."

The maiden sprang backward to avoid them, but they were too quick for her, and in an instant she had her arms securely bound behind her back.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SEVERED ROPE.

It was a bitterly cruel blow to Beatrice Markham to find herself a bound prisoner.

She had pluckily resented the insult of Muello, the Mexican, by striking him with her riding-whip, regardless of the consequences to herself.

She had barely escaped being bound before by her two captors, on a compromise that she would give no trouble; but now she had the chief to deal with, and he was worse than his men.

"Well, Sir Highwayman, you show that the stories told of you are true, when you descend so low as to bind a young girl," said Fred Gibbs, in a voice quivering with passion, while his face was as pallid as the dead.

"I shall allow nothing to stand between me and the securing of that treasure, Lieutenant Gibbs, and the sooner you and Miss Markham understand that fact the better for you both."

"How can persecuting that young lady gain your ends?"

"She knows where the gold is."

"Upon my honor I do not," cried Beatrice.

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know that my uncle Matthew, whom my father had not seen since his youth, whom I never had seen, became a miner in New Mexico and amassed a large fortune."

"This fortune, in gold, he hid away as he dug it, and when dying with consumption he sent Dashing Charlie, a scout, to our home, to bring my father to him."

"Dashing Charlie ran the gantlet of your outlaw band and took my father back with him."

"He also got my father and the gold, which was left to me, away from the mines."

"But he had to turn back and advised my father to hide the gold, getting it at another time, as you were upon his trail."

"My father did so, and was afterward attacked in camp by you, receiving a wound, which in the end proved fatal."

"But we got him home and it was there he died, and suddenly, never having told me, or any one else that I know of, where the gold was hidden."

"Now, Sir Outlaw, this is the true story of that gold, and Lieutenant Gibbs knows nothing about it whatever, so I beg of you to allow us to go upon our way."

Beatrice had spoken feelingly, and with the air of perfect truth.

The outlaws had listened to her with the deepest attention, but the chief at once said, showing that he doubted her:

"I have heard your story, and in part it may be true."

"It is all true, sir!" decidedly spoken.

"It is not, for your father did not tell you of that treasure, but left a map and papers describing where and how to find it, and these were for the officer who came to escort you to the fort—all of which you well know!"

"That is false; I have no such papers!"

"No, it is not false; and more—I believe you got that treasure on your way here and that it has been sent with your horses to the fort."

"But they are, ere this, captured, so the gold will fall into my hands in spite of that ruse, my lady!"

The chief watched narrowly the effect of his words. He was experimenting, knowing that if the gold had gone with the horses, the maiden would betray her feelings at her loss.

But, instead, Beatrice said, calmly:

"I feel sorry for my poor maid, Jophine, and those with her, if they have fallen into the hands of your merciless men, for I fear, in their disappointment at finding no gold, your miscreants will kill them."

"But will they find no gold, you still insist?"

"A little, with some jewelry of mine which Jophine has, along with my wardrobe, which you can scarcely find of any use, though you will doubtless rob me of it, all the same!"

The chief appeared disappointed, for he felt convinced that the escort party had not secured the gold on their way back.

"Well, I am perfectly sure that this officer knows all about that gold's hiding-place, and I shall act accordingly. No deception or falsehood will avail either of you."

"Upon my honor, I do not know where the treasure is secreted," earnestly declared the lieutenant.

"And if you did, you would not tell—is not that so, Mr. Gibbs?"

"Yes, as-uredly!"

"I knew that."

"I am not one to betray any trust confided to my keeping, be it a word or treasure, and surely am not a man to aid you to rob a young girl."

"Which words convince me that you do know."

"Have you not just heard me say that I did not know, upon my honor as a soldier?"

"I know that officers and gentlemen of the army hold their words and honor above par; but this is a case where you can assert things with mental reservations—seeing what is at stake."

"A man who makes a mental reservation lies to himself, that is all," replied the officer, flushing in his anger.

"Well, I feel certain that you do know all about the hiding-place of this gold, and there is but one way to wring the secret from both of you."

"And what way is that?"

"To stretch your neck until you are dead, unless you reveal the secret!" was the vicious threat.

"You could never force me to tell, even if I knew, by any act of brutality, or even murder!" was the prompt rejoinder.

"We shall see."

"And you could not frighten me into telling, if I knew," retorted Beatrice, firmly.

"Perhaps, miss; but you will hardly see this officer strung up before your face and not tell," mocked the villain.

"You dare not do an act so evil, so vile."

"Oh, yes; I dare and shall do it."

"You will dare hang me, an army officer, you say?" demanded Lieutenant Gibbs, with almost fierce indignation betrayed in face and action.

"I will, most certainly!"

"I defy you! So do your worst!"

"No, no! No! Spare him, I beseech you!" pleaded Beatrice, now thoroughly alarmed.

"Men, I wish you to stand ready to obey my orders."

"Yes, chief."

"Now, young lady, you will hardly see this officer hanged like a criminal, when a word from you can save him?"

"My God! if I had that accursed gold, I would give it all to save a human life!"

"Then confess your secret, or Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs hangs."

"Alas! I can do nothing for you, Lieutenant Gibbs, for I do not know where the treasure is."

"I know that you do not, cousin mine. This man is one to carry out his threat, but you he dares not harm; so I beg of you to report all to Colonel Buckner, and I know that a day of reckoning will surely come for Muello, the Mexican and his band. The Government will hunt him down, even to the very gates of Mexico, if need be!"

"Farewell, my sweet Beatrice, and tell my colonel that I did not flinch from my fate."

"Have you no mercy?"

And Beatrice, bound as she was, dropped upon her knees before the outlaw.

"None! Lead my horse forward, men, and drag this officer into mid-air," was the masked chief's decisive command.

The order was obeyed; the lieutenant's body was dragged into the air while the chief cried, sternly:

"Now confess, or he dies like a dog!"

Even as he spoke, there came the crack of a rifle from the timber; the rope was severed, and the officer fell heavily to the ground, while, with a wild yell, Dashing Charlie Emmett, mounted upon his splendid roan stallion, came bounding upon the scene.

CHAPTER XIX.

PLAYING A BOLD HAND.

DASHING CHARLIE left the Den of Destiny in Valley Mines, considerably puzzled about this constant appearance of his "Double."

He had appeared to Miner Markham in his cabin, while he had been on his way to Texas after the ranchero brother of the dying man, and had nearly gotten from him papers which might have led to the discovery of the gold.

This same "Double" had also appeared several times in Valley Mines, playing cards there with Old Rhubarb the doctor, paying his losses in counterfeit money, getting bad bills changed for good, buying things at the store on Dashing Charlie's credit, having his horse shod in the same manner and continually passing and defrauding under the guise of the scout.

This greatly disturbed Dashing Charlie, for he had very nearly been lynched, along with Captain Markham for the doings of his Double.

But for the coming of Lieutenant Gibbs and his cavalymen in the nick of time, and who vouched for him, Dashing Charlie's life would have ended at the cabin of Miner Markham, while the dead owner lay there awaiting burial.

And with such a Double he would surely yet get into trouble, Dashing Charlie well knew, for he could see that in spite of all proof to the contrary, he was still believed to be by many playing a double game—that he in reality had no second self.

"You must clear up this mystery, Charlie, for it reflects upon you in a bad way," Poker Paul, the landlord of the Den of Destiny had said, as he was taking his departure.

"That is just what I intend to do, Poker Paul, but my friends want to hold on to this man the next time he crosses their path, and had they done so to-night I would have caught him in your place."

"True, but no one suspected that it was other than yourself."

"Well, no one has seen me gamble yet, and he always has done so, while he invariably shows large rolls of money and gets the big bills changed, and I never show my money."

"I'll be onto him next time, Dashing Charlie, you may be sure."

"But are you going over to the store?"

"Yes, I have some things to get there, which I ordered put up."

"You know where to find me, Poker Paul, if I am needed."

"Yes, good-night."

Poker Paul returned to his duties in the saloon, while Dashing Charlie mounted his horse and rode over to the store.

He had purchased another horse, which he felt he might need, and some articles desired for his camp, and the storekeeper had promised to have

all ready for him, the goods packed on the new animal.

"Ho, Dashing Charlie, did you forget anything?" asked Matt Morgan, as the scout entered the store.

"I came for my horse and the goods, Morgan."

"Came for your horse and the goods?" asked the storekeeper in surprise.

"Yes, Morgan, for you said you would have the things all ready on the horse for me."

"I don't see the joke, Dashing Charlie."

"What joke?"

"Why you got the things nearly an hour ago."

"I got them?"

"Sure."

"You are crazy, Morgan. So where is your partner, Remsen, for I will deal with him."

"Am I crazy?"

"You act it surely, for I have not been here since I gave you the order— Ah! now I understand."

"Understand what?"

"My Double has been in town to-night."

"This was not your Double, Dashing Charlie, but you."

"Go slow, pard, for he played it on others over at the Den."

"Your partner, Remsen, was up to see me at my camp, and he came back and found my Double in Poker Paul's Den, and having just left me asked how he got there ahead of him."

"This set my Double to thinking, and he got out a short while before I entered the saloon."

"Now I find he has been here."

"He certainly has."

"Tell me of him."

"He came in and I saluted him by your name."

"He asked me the amount of my bill, and I told him that for the horse and things Remsen had brought the order for, and which you called out to have ready as you rode by, the amount was three hundred and fifty dollars."

"Well?"

"He handed me a five-hundred-dollar bill."

"And you gave him the change?"

"Certainly."

"Let me see the bill."

It was gotten, and after examining it Dashing Charlie said:

"It is a counterfeit, as I supposed it was, Morgan."

"Counterfeit?"

"It is, but keep it, for he may redeem it some day; but he took my horse and goods with him?"

"He surely did."

"Those I will be responsible to you for; but have you another good animal on hand?"

"We have."

"I want him, and the same order filled."

"I will go out and look at the horse while you put up the order, and please be in a hurry, for I am anxious to be on the trail of this Double of mine."

"He rode up the mountain trail toward your lay-out."

"All right; his trail will keep until morning, I guess, for he rode one horse and led another."

"Yes," answered Morgan, who was greatly puzzled at having seen a man the exact counterpart of Dashing Charlie and his partner, Remsen, just then coming in, was told the surprising story, and said:

"Dashing Charlie must find that Double of his, or the Vigilantes will take no stock in his denial of the story and hold him responsible."

CHAPTER XX.

TRAILING HIS DOUBLE.

DASHING CHARLIE soon found a horse to suit him, threw a pack-saddle upon his back and led him up to the rear of the store, where the purchases he made were packed securely upon him.

He had determined to make himself as comfortable as possible in his cavern quarters, and with a few things taken from the cabin of the miner, before it was set on fire, he had fitted up the cave so as to make it appear quite home-like.

He made no effort to find any trace of his Double that night, for it would be impossible to follow a trail in the darkness, but rode straight on to his camp.

His new horse was staked out, his roan being allowed to go loose, for he was as faithful as a dog, and would never leave his master.

Then the cavern was put to rights by the light of a blazing fire built in the chimney which the miner had made while there.

Satisfied with his work, Dashing Charlie lay down to rest; but he was awake an hour before dawn, and just as it began to grow light he was at the store of Remsen & Morgan and searching for a trail.

Those who saw him felt that he was on the track of his Double, at least those of the miners who believed there was such a being as his counterpart.

At last he started off, following the tracks of two horses.

He had made sure that one of these tracks

had been made by the animal purchased from the storekeeper the evening before, and which his Double had taken away with him.

The trails were not those of two horses going side by side, but of an animal following one by which he was led.

Out of the Valley Camps it went, and the scout was surprised to discover that it led toward his own camp.

Reaching the vicinity of his camp, he saw the trails still heading toward his home.

"I could have started on the trail here had I only known it," he muttered.

Reaching his camp, he saw that his Double had been there the night before, a fact which he had not been able to discover in the darkness.

"Nothing has been disturbed that I can see, and yet he certainly came here."

"Well, I'll have breakfast and then follow his trail."

He had ridden his horse to the mining-camps that morning, so he staked him out, got breakfast, and mounting his roan, set off on the trail he had so persistently followed.

Thus the day was passed, and when night came on he had lost the trail irrevocably in the mountains, miles away from his camp.

"Is he, or is he not, one of the Mountain Marauders, is a question I cannot now answer."

"But I must know. I will yet find that man, for much depends upon it, yes, far more than my life."

But the days passed away and Dashing Charlie did not find his Double.

He devoted much time to the work, would drop in at Valley Camps at unexpected times, visited the stores, the mines and the Den of Destiny, yet always without avail.

Now and then he knew that his Double had been seen, for he had been spoken of as having been himself at such and such a place, when he knew that it could only have been his counterpart.

Then, too, Iron Ike the Blacksmith had been paid his bill for horse-shoeing, and the bank-note handed him was a five hundred dollar bill, which had been changed with good money.

In fact the miners were discovering that they were receiving a great many counterfeit bills, and men began to swear vengeance against the one who was passing the spurious money if they could only catch him.

The more diligently Dashing Charlie worked to solve the mystery the more he found himself at fault.

He had, however, discovered that the counterfeit had no connection with the Black Bravos, as the Mountain Marauders were called by the soldiers, though given another name in the mining-camps.

Hunter Dave had also come in for a close espionage by the scout, but he had not been able to fasten anything on him by which he could get a chance to act.

The miners now and then saw this Double of Dashing Charlie, and each time he was met with, some one was the sufferer through having had bad money put upon them.

This naturally caused them to become more and more wary of Dashing Charlie, and suspicious that he was playing a double game.

"Why can others see this Double, while he who is constantly watching for him can never do so?"

Such was the question asked in every gathering of miners, for Dashing Charlie had a number of enemies in the camps, men who would have been only too glad of an excuse to get rid of him by fair means or foul, for he was a man to be dreaded.

One day Dashing Charlie was going into the Valley Mines, when he came upon a gang of miners who fairly started at seeing him.

They were returning to their camps from work, and one of them called out:

"Ho, Dashing Charlie, is this you, or your Double?"

"I am myself, pard, and no other."

"Waal, it hain't been a mile back up the trail we met your Double there, if you be the real one."

"Where was this?"

"Back up the trail a mile."

"Thank you, pard; now tell me all you noticed about this man?"

They did so, and Dashing Charlie was off like a shot on the trail of his Double, muttering to himself as he rode along:

"Now I have a chance to bring him to bay."

CHAPTER XXI.

LOST.

WHEN he met the miners, Dashing Charlie was mounted upon the horse he had bought from the storekeepers.

He had found the animal a good one, fleet, willing, and with great endurance, and so he urged him on at a great speed to try and overtake his Double.

Night was not very far away, and he hoped to come up with him before it came on.

But though he rode rapidly he could get no sight of the man whom he sought, when the trail enabled him to see far ahead.

He saw where the miners had met his Double, their tracks going each side of him, and there was evidence of a short halt.

Then the trail led on up into the mountain away from the camps altogether.

His Double could hardly suspect that he was after him, and yet the tracks revealed the fact that the horse was in a sweeping gallop.

It was a great disappointment to the scout when night came on and shut out the trail from sight.

But he lost no time in bemoaning his misfortune, but at once turned his horse and started for his own camp, some miles distant, at a sweeping gallop.

He did not draw rein until he had reached his cavern home, and then his tired horse was put into a stockade pen he had built for his horses, when he should be away, and where they could get both grass and water.

Hastily he got together some provisions and traps, for a week's tramp, also a lantern, and mounting his roan started to return to the spot where he had left the trail of his Double at night-fall.

He had reached the spot before midnight, looked to the comfort of his horse, spread his blankets and went to sleep camping literally upon the trail of his foe.

With the first glimmer of light he was ready to start, and taking up the trail pushed rapidly along, for he knew that he had a tireless horse under him.

A ride of three hours brought him to where his Double had camped for the night, and here Dashing Charlie halted for rest and breakfast.

He marked the tracks of his enemy, measured them with his own, noted every peculiarity about the hoof-tracks of the Unknown's horse, and after a halt of an hour pushed on once more on the trail.

It was quite fresh from there on, and Dashing Charlie was glad to see that his enemy was not pushing his horse, but allowed him to go slow.

On the contrary he urged Comanche to a sweeping gallop, whenever the nature of the trail permitted.

Then too he would dismount and walk up and down the hills to spare his horse all in his power.

Another halt was made at noon, and just where his Double had also stopped to rest.

"He is not far ahead of us, Comanche, and we'll soon find this Double of ours, old horse, for he rides a roan too, your very match the miners say, but I cannot believe it."

A rest of half an hour refreshed both man and horse and once more they took the trail, Comanche seeming to understand what was expected of him.

"He cannot be far ahead, Comanche," said Dashing Charlie soon after, as he saw how fresh the tracks were that he was following.

He knew that he had been riding at least three miles to the other's one, so must soon be in sight of him.

The country was very wild about him now, and Dashing Charlie remembered that some miles ahead the trail ran across an open valley, and this would give him from the range a good view of the way for several miles.

There he would see his enemy, and he wished to reach the range in time to get a good view of him while he was close at hand.

So he slackened his pace that he might not overtake him before he reached the valley.

At last he came to the top of the range, just where the trail descended to the valley.

Dismounting, he peered over and there beheld a horseman just moving out from the shadow of the range.

"There is my man, and I must crowd him, so that he will not have too long a start."

"You must catch him, Comanche, before he reaches the other range, which is a good three miles away."

"He will have all of half a mile the start of you, good horse, but you can do it."

"Come, follow me."

He started down the trail on foot in a trot, and Comanche came close behind.

At the base there was a stream, and giving Comanche a refreshing drink, the scout mounted and started off on the trail once more.

There before him, half a mile away, was the horseman, and the scout hoped to get much nearer him before he was discovered, or his coming heard.

He hoped also that his enemy would stand at bay and fight it out, and not run.

When he had gotten within a few hundred yards of him and not been discovered, he said exultantly:

"We have him now, Comanche, for no horse on this border can keep ahead of you in a two-mile race, with only the start that one has."

"After him, old horse!"

With the command Comanche sprung forward like an arrow from a bow.

For some distance he went before there was any sign from the stranger that he knew he had an enemy upon his heels.

Then his horse gave a start and frightened snort, and looking behind him, the rider saw that he was being pursued.

But, contrary to the expectations of Dashing Charlie, the man did not take to flight.

He simply came to a halt, and appeared to be as anxious to meet his pursuer as the scout was desirous of coming up with him.

As he drew nearer, Dashing Charlie examined the stranger very closely, and seeing that he made no hostile demonstration, also relinquished his grasp of his revolver.

A few moments more and he drew rein by his side with the disappointed remark:

"My God! you are not the man I seek."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WRONG MAN.

"Who is it yer is arter, pard?"

The question was coolly asked, and the stranger seemed not in the least flurried.

Dashing Charlie gazed at him with surprise and annoyance, for he saw that he was by no means the counterpart of himself.

He was mounted upon a roan horse it was true, and a fine animal he was, a very fair match for Comanche.

But the bridle was of rawhide, the saddle an old army relic, and a thick roll of blankets was strapped on behind.

The stranger was a man with iron-gray hair and beard, both worn long, a dilapidated sombrero, and well worn buckskin leggings and coat.

But his rifle was a good one, and his revolvers looked to be of the best manufacture.

His boots were new, and upon one heel he wore an ancient spur.

The man appeared like a dweller in the mountains, one who loved the life of a wanderer of the trackless plains of the West.

"I was looking for a man," and Dashing Charlie eyed the stranger sharply as he spoke, "who has been playing the part of my Double, my friend."

"Playin' Double on yer, has ye?"

"Yes."

"Waal, thet don't look jist easy ter do, now I sees yer as I does."

"You think it not an easy task to counter-part me, eh?"

"Waal, I thinks it a hard job, for you is out o' the common run in looks."

"And he doubled me in outfit, dress, as well as in horse."

"Now, ther horse are easy, for I has a ani-mile here as looks like yours, and I may say as how I got him from a man as might be your twin brother."

"Ah! when did you get that horse?"

"A couple of hours or so ago."

"Where?"

"Back on ther trail I were a-followin'."

"From whom?"

"Now, yer is too hard fer me; but as I said he were a heaps like you, havin' ther same yaller hair and looks in general."

"And you met this man back on the trail?"

"I did."

"I saw no trail excepting the one I was following."

"Maybe not, as yer was too busy followin' one ter see another; but I were going down ther range, across his trail, and met him."

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked me to trade horses, seeing as his had lost a shoe and was gittin' lame, and he were in a powerful hurry."

"Why he was a-hurryin' I guess I knows now, seein' you, for you looks fight clean through, pard."

Dashing Charlie glanced at the hoofs of the horse and saw that the shoe was missing from the left fore foot.

"Move up your horse a few paces, please, pard."

The man did so and the horse went slightly lame.

"That horse would be very lame if ridden fast or far over these trails."

"You is right, but resting he is O. K."

"What kind of a horse was it you traded for him?"

"Ther best I ever seen."

"Every man thinks his own horse the best."

"Yes, but I had a good one and I has ter, for I hain't hankerin' arter being scalped, and when I can stand off Injuns I wants ter outhoof 'em."

"Why did you trade for a lame horse then?"

"Oh! he hain't lame ter hurt, pard, and besides I got boot."

"Oh, you did."

"You bet."

"How much, may I ask?"

"Waal, a clean hundred in new money."

"Will you let me see your money, pard?"

"I say, young feller, are this a perlitte way of sayin' I is ter hand over my cash?"

"Oh, no, not at all, for I am not a road-agent."

"I kinder thought you was one of the Mountain Marauder gang."

"On the contrary, I would like to catch one of that gang, but I will tell you what I am, for you may have heard of me."

"Like as not, for I hangs out on ther plains and knows a power sight o' folks."

"I am called at the fort Dashing Charlie, the Guide, Scout and Indian-fighter."

"Now I want ter know."

"Yes, but my name is Charles Emmett."

"Well, I do beat."

"At what?"

"That's ther name t'other feller give me as his own."

"The man you met back on the trail?"

"Thet same."

"With whom you traded horses?"

"I means thet man."

"He said his name was Dashing Charlie?"

"Thet's what he said; and more, he told me he were a scout at ther fort."

"He lied to you."

"Did he?"

"Yes, for he is the man who is my Double."

"Waal, you do be alike as two peas, and when I seen yer coming along arter me I thought as how yer'd got tired o' yer bargain and wanted ter trade back ag'in."

"My friend, you have been cheated."

"I don't think so, pard, though my horse were a good one, but I has his equal here, and a hundred in money besides."

"That is jist it; the money you have is not good, I am sure."

The old man started, and asked quickly:

"What does yer mean?"

"I mean that the man I am after is a counterfeiter, and has been passing bogus money in Valley Camps for months."

"That is why I asked to see the bills he gave you, to see if they were good or bad."

"Waal, here they is, pard," and the old man handed out a roll of bills, among them being five crisp new bank-notes, each for twenty dollars.

"They are counterfeit, my friend."

"Does yer mean it?"

"I do."

"Waal, all I wants is ter meet thet man ag'in, for I'll take it out o' him sart'in."

"Which way did he go when he left you?"

"Right back on ther trail I were coming when I tarning inter this one."

"Tell me jist where it was that you met him?"

This the man did, and then Dashing Charlie asked:

"Now please let me know your name?"

"Buckskin Bill the boys calls me."

"You are a trapper I believe, for I have heard of you?"

"Yas, pard, I traps, hunts, guides and scouts jist as I pleases; but be you going my way?"

"I am going back on the trail of my Double, for he is the man I wish to find," said Dashing Charlie.

"I is sorry yer didn't come sooner, pard, so yer c'u'd have got ther right man."

"Good-by, and I hopes yer'll catch him."

"Yes, I hope so, for that is my intention" and with a wave of the hand Dashing Charlie started back on the trail he had come.

The stranger watched for a minute and then went on his way slowly as before.

After awhile he turned in his saddle and looked back, just as Dashing Charlie was disappearing from sight in the timber at the base of the range.

"Well, that was a pretty close call," he muttered.

"It is lucky I met my pard on the range and made the change of horses, or it would have come to a duel between Dashing Charlie and his Double sure."

"I hope he won't overhaul my pard; but I must go back and see," and he turned back on the trail he had been going.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SURPRISE FOR THE SCOUT.

DASHING CHARLIE rode back on the trail to where the man he had met had told him the Unknown foe had turned off of it.

As he reached the top of the range and glanced back the way he had come he saw the one he had followed just disappearing in the distance, but he had no idea that within the next ten minutes he had turned about and was following him.

He found the spot where the two men had met, and saw boot-tracks there as well as hoof-tracks, and branched off on the one which his Double had taken.

He read from the signs he saw there that the horse which had come down the range had gone back on the same trail, only having a different rider, while the animal he had followed was the one ridden by Buckskin Bill.

Night was coming on, and as he could not follow the trail in the dark, the scout pushed rapidly on.

He continued the same rapid gait as long as he could discern the trail, only halting when darkness fell.

His first care was for his horse, and then he had his own supper.

Staking Comanche out where he could get good feeding, Dashing Charlie lighted his lantern and by its aid followed the trail on foot.

It was not very fast going, but he determined not to spare himself, for if he could thus keep the trail for ten miles, he could return, start before dawn and press rapidly on to as far as he had gone and be ready to take it up there at daylight, thus giving Comanche a good rest, if he did not get any himself.

It was just one o'clock when he decided that he had followed the trail fully ten miles.

So he walked rapidly back again to his starting-point to get Comanche and his traps, and reach the place where he left off in time to get an hour's rest and breakfast, and then be ready for the trail with the first faint tinge of daybreak.

He was a rapid walker and made the distance back again in less than two hours.

But as he drew near the spot where he had left Comanche, he heard groans.

Quickly he halted and listened.

Had Comanche fallen by becoming entangled in his stake-rope and hurt himself? he wondered.

He called to his horse, and a neigh was the answer.

He went toward the animal and found him still fast to the stake.

Then again came the groan.

"What is it, old horse?"

"Has somebody been here?"

The horse appeared nervous, and Dashing Charlie stepped away from him and listened.

Again came a groan, and the scout called out:

"Who is that?"

"Oh, pard! come and help me!" cried a voice apparently in great anguish.

But Dashing Charlie was too old a border-man to be caught in a trap, so called out:

"Who are you, and what is the matter?"

"Is that you, Pard Larry?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"I'm whet is left o' yer pard, Buckskin Bill, for ther durned horse o' thet feller Dashing Charlie who was a-trailin' yer, has done for me."

"Not so bad as that, I hope, Bill."

"It are, it are, for every rib in my old carcass is broke—oh, Lord! I am dying, and I has been such a wicked man."

"Come, Pard Larry, and do what yer kin fer me!"

Dashing Charlie now advanced toward the dark thicket from whence came the voice, and said in a sympathetic tone:

"My poor old pard, I am sorry to find you in this shape, and I'll do all I can for you; but how did it happen?"

"Has yer seen Dashing Charlie?"

"Did you?"

"Yas, he overtook me soon arter I left you, and I give a guy about tradin' horses with you and all that, and he started back on yer trail, for he was dead set on catchin' you— Oh, Lord! but I is dyin'!"

"I think not, pard, so brace up."

"Thar hain't no brace in me now, Pard Larry."

"Well, about this man, Dashing Charlie?"

"He started back on yer trail, and as soon as he were out of sight I rode on to a thicket, shod the roan, and put back ter trail him."

"Yes."

"I come on arter night fell, looking fer a camp-fire, when I, too, would stop; but my horse led me up to whar thet devil of a stallion were staked out, and I know'd thet Dashing Charlie were away somewhere, so tried ter run off with his outfit."

"Oh, Lord! I'd rather tackle a grizzle b'ar than thet roan devil, fer he snatched ther flesh out o' me with his teeth and pawed me until my rib is broke inter pieces and I am done for."

"I'm glad yer has come back, Larry, but keep yer eye open fer thet scout, for he are a terror."

"I'll be on the watch for him; but now let me see what I can do for you."

Feeling the pulse of the man, and listening to his heart-beat, while he made as good an examination as was possible of his injuries, Dashing Charlie felt that he had spoken the truth in saying that the roan stallion had "done for him," for he knew that Buckskin Bill could not live.

"I were almost gone when I heerd you call, Pard Larry."

"I feels life a-slippin' away from me, and I has been a awful bad man."

"Yer better take heed o' my fate, Pard Larry, and mend yer ways."

"I will, pard; but I deem it my duty to tell you that I also feel you are dying, and to ask if there is anything I can do for you?"

"Waal, no, for I has cut clean away from all as I loved in ther long ago."

"I did try to be a better man, and so give up ther road-agent bizziness, and tried ter live honest-like."

"Then you come along and got me ter be yer pard in makin' bad money, and I thought I'd git rich and tarn honest ag'in; but here I is, and I'm a-goin' fast, so says ter you ter mend yer ways while yer kin."

"Don't wait until yer tackles Dashing Charlie, for it will be too late then, and death-bed repentance don't go up yonder I feels sart'in, for any durned fool will repent at ther last."

"Give me yer grip, Pard Larry, for I feels like I was fallin' down a precipice— Oh!"

A convulsive spring the man gave, and then his grasp upon the scout's hand relaxed, and the end of death was upon his lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VALUABLE DISCOVERY.

FOR some moments the scout sat by the side of the dead man, who had called himself Buckskin Bill, and who had died believing him to be his companion in crime, "Larry," as he had called him.

Dashing Charlie had thus far made the discovery that this man "Larry" was his Double, and that he was the ringleader in making counterfeit money.

The man Buckskin Bill having died, the scout was not one to leave his body unburied, and confident that he had gained something in hearing what the stranger had said, he was in no hurry then to press on after the one whom he had been following.

"I will catch him in good time.

"I can afford to wait," he muttered.

Then he lighted his lantern and turned the light upon the dead.

One glance, and he said:

"Ah! Comanche, you did your work but too well.

"But I cannot blame you, old horse."

He laid his blanket over the dead form, and then wrapping himself in his own covering, lay down to rest, for he had decided not to move until the morning.

When he awoke it was dawn, and he beheld Comanche quietly feeding with no thought of what he had done.

Hitched not far away was the roan horse which Buckskin Bill had ridden to the scene of his death, and which had served as the double of Comanche when his master was playing the Double of Dashing Charlie in the mines.

"He is a fine animal, and a good match, indeed, as far as looks go, for Comanche.

"Ah! his rider did shoe him, as he said, last night," and Dashing Charlie looked the animal over, after which he staked him out to feed.

Examining his saddle, he discovered in it a roll of counterfeit bills, numbering some thousands of dollars.

There was also a paper of directions, written in a good hand, which read:

"You are to start in three days, if I do not return, and work Fort Blank for a year you can get rid of."

"Go by way of the Twin Rocks Range, and I may meet you there by Thursday evening.

"If not, I shall come on to camp and await your return from the fort.

"I am sorry not to find you in camp, so leave this note, as I must go on to Valley Camps to get rid of some more of the boodle, for D. C. is scouting to the northward now and it is too dangerous to venture in and chance a meeting with him.

"You will find me in camp upon your return, but go slow in spreading the plaster, if you value your neck.

"If I should be away upon your return, await my coming, for it is necessary to make a change or D. C. will yet trail us here.

DOUBLE L."

Dashing Charlie read this communication over several times before he made any comment thereon.

Then he said:

"Double L stands for L. L., I take it.

"L. L. is the man who is playing my Double, and his first name is Larry.

"He did visit the Valley Camps, and met Buckskin Bill on the Twin Rocks Range.

"He knew that I was pursuing him, and so changed horses with Buckskin Bill to throw me off the scent.

"He evidently has some way of hiding his own trail further on, thinking to throw me off the scent.

"Well, maybe he can cover up his trail from me, but I think that his horse will still follow it, for he will go to the man's camp, if he has ever been there, and I take it the two men have a camp, from that letter of instructions.

"So Buckskin Bill was going to Fort Blank to pass his counterfeit money upon the soldiers?

"And he could have done it, too, for no one would have suspected him there.

"Well, I'll do my duty by him as a fellow-man, and then go on the hunt for his pard Larry, my Double."

So saying, Dashing Charlie went over to where the body of the dead man lay, and making a search found some more counterfeit money, in notes ranging from one to twenty dollar bills.

He also found some papers, which he put away with the counterfeit money and then wrapping the mutilated form of the man, who had been so savagely attacked by the roan stallion, in his blanket he dug a grave and consigned him to it.

Rocks were piled on it to protect it from the wolves, and then the scout mounted the roan horse, leading his own animal with the traps of the dead man strapped upon him, and started upon the trail he had been following.

He did not fret at the delay, for he seemed to feel that he had gained by it in making the discovery he had, and he allowed the horse he rode to take his own course.

The roan went forward at a swift walk, taking the trail as though he knew it well.

Coming to the spot where Dashing Charlie had

halted the night before, his rider drew him off the trail to see just what he would do.

Having gone a short distance off in the timber he allowed the roan his rein once more and back to the trail he went, following it as unerringly as a hound would a scent.

"This looks as though my dumb trailer was going to do what I could not—find my Double for me," said Dashing Charlie, with evident gratification at the thought.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DUMB TRAILER.

DASHING CHARLIE had ridden a dozen miles when he came to a stream crossing the trail.

It was a mildly-flowing stream with rocky banks, and the two horses seemed glad to slake their thirst in its cool waters.

Comanche had followed his master as obediently as a dog, and when they reached the torrent, then off the trail a short distance was seen a camp-fire.

A log was still burning, and the trail led to it and from it.

"Here it was my Double passed the night.

"But the trail goes back to the stream from here.

"Ah! this must be where my Double expected to throw me off the trail.

"Well, we shall see."

He looked the ground over carefully, but could find no track except the one that led back to the stream from the camp-fire.

The bed of the stream up and down could be followed by a horse, though it looked as if it would be rough traveling, Dashing Charlie thought.

After having searched in vain for a trail leading further, the scout mounted the outlaw's roan and said:

"I give it up, so you be the trailer from here, good horse."

The animal started directly upon his way, taking no heed of the camp-fire and track leading back to and from it.

He went on along the trail which led on further into the mountains, but along which there was no trace of a track left by the horse ridden by the scout's Double.

"You are right, old fellow, so push on your way, for you know where you are going," said Dashing Charlie to the horse he rode.

The animal went unhesitatingly on his way, and Comanche trotted behind apparently perfectly content to follow the other's lead.

Thus several hours passed away and another stream was crossed, when suddenly Dashing Charlie drew rein.

There before him, coming out of the water at the ford he was crossing, was the track of the horse he had been following.

"Ah! this is the same stream I crossed away back yonder, it having made a big curve.

"And more, my Double has stuck to it and come out here.

"His trail is a very fresh one, for he necessarily traveled very slowly, so he cannot be very far ahead.

"If I can only catch up with him before night-fall I will be content, while I do not believe he expects further pursuit, supposing that he has thrown me off his trail.

"Now, my dumb trailer, once more go on your way, for I have every confidence in you."

Again the scout moved on, after a short rest, and the horses were urged to a faster pace than before.

The roan he rode did not hesitate once, seemingly knowing just where he was going without guidance or urging.

But night again fell with the Double of Dashing Charlie still out of sight ahead.

His trail looked fresher and fresher, though, and the scout brought his horses to a halt, gave them another rest, while he prepared his supper, and resuming his way once more, kept his eyes eagerly watching ahead for the glimmer of a camp-fire.

The trail soon led into a part of the country which was dangerous in the extreme to travel in the darkness, for the horses could hardly keep their footing, and Dashing Charlie decided to take no chances of crippling his dumb guide, or breaking his own or Comanche's bones, so hunted for a camping-place.

This he found after some difficulty, when, after caring for his horses, he sought his blankets, glad to get a night's rest, for he was tired out.

There was a heavy mist in the valley in the morning, so he did not resume his way until the sun rose and dispelled it, and then he saw that his guide had not, as he had feared, gone astray in the darkness, for he was still following on the trail of his Double.

He had been but a half-hour on his way, and the daylight revealed fully its dangers and his wisdom in camping for the night, when his dumb guide turned into a narrow canyon.

A glance showed that the tracks also led that way, and Dashing Charlie said to himself:

"He had traveled the trail often before at night, so came on to his camp.

"It surely cannot be far away, so I will go slow."

On he went for a mile or more, and then saw that the trail led up the mountain-side.

He dismounted, convinced that the camp of the counterfeiters was near, and not daring to advance upon horseback.

Making his way on foot, he soon came upon a log cabin situated upon a ledge of rock.

The door was closed and padlocked on the outside, and no answer came to the scout's knock.

He had looked about him, and found that the horse was not visible, his track leading down into the canyon by another trail.

Dashing his foot against the door, after several vigorous kicks, he broke it in and entered.

The hut was unoccupied, and the furniture was of the rudest kind and home-made.

Upon the table was a note, and it was addressed to Buckskin Bill.

The scout started as he saw the address, and knew that it would never meet the eyes then closed in death.

Taking it up, he read aloud as follows:

"PARD BILL:—

"I have decided to act upon the safe plan and leave this country, as I have a presentiment that D. C., now on my trail, will track me to my destruction.

"I leave you the money now in your possession, and which will amount to considerable to you.

"I thank you for the use of your cabin for the past six months, and your hospitality and services, for you have served me well.

"I arrived home to night, convinced that D. C. is upon my trail, though I hope I threw him off, either by the ruse of changing horses with you, or following the brook from where the trail crosses the brook.

"I take my other horse with me to carry my traps, my tools of trade, and I shall seek another mining-camp to get rid of my wares.

"Wishing you success in life, and leaving this letter to greet you upon your return. I am

"Your Pard,
"L. L."

"Well, he has gone; but I shall keep on his trail, and maybe his presentiment of dying by my hand will come true."

And, an hour after, Dashing Charlie was again upon the trail of the counterfeiter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHOT AT LONG RANGE.

DASHING CHARLIE was not one to despair if matters did not go to please him.

He was not at all cast down when he found the counterfeiter's cabin deserted and the note telling that the bird had flown.

He was disappointed, but did not give up by any means.

That the counterfeiter had not a very long start of him from the cabin he felt sure, for he had left after sunrise, as the trail showed, and he had gone with two horses, so could be the more readily followed, while he would not be able to make such good time.

Then it flashed upon Dashing Charlie's mind that perhaps the note was a blind, a decoy, and the counterfeiter had not left after all.

"I shall give him the benefit of a doubt, leave the roan here to let him think Buckskin Bill has returned, for, fortunately, I brought his traps along, and I will see where the trail goes, and then take a run to the fort, coming back this way.

"I am anxious about Captain Markham's daughter ever since Texas Charlie brought me the letter from Colonel Buckner telling me her father was dead and she was coming to the fort to live with him.

"I only hope she arrived there in safety; but I will soon know."

There was a corral in the canyon near the counterfeiter's cabin, and into this the roan horse was placed to remain until the scout's return.

The saddle and bridle of the dead man were then hung up near the cabin, the door closed, and the staple put in its place again as before, to appear as though it had not been opened by force.

Then the scout mounted his own horse and went on the trail.

He followed the tracks of the two horses without any difficulty, and found that the trail ran in the direction of the fort.

"He has either dared to go to the fort, or has gone around the mountain-spur, rather than over the range, which will take him within a dozen miles of the post."

After a few moments of silence, he added:

"But I will follow him, go where he may."

He had just gotten to a point on the mountain-side when, glancing back he beheld in the distance in the valley a group of men.

He turned his glass upon them, and recognized the uniform of an officer and the black dress of the Mountain Marauders.

He also saw the form of a woman in their midst.

Instantly he turned about and started for the scene.

He had nearly reached the timber when he saw a horseman riding like the wind toward the spot where he had seen the group.

Dashing Charlie's quick glance told him that it was one of the outlaw band.

He was not one to count odds when people in distress needed his aid.

His thought was that a party from the fort had been held up by the Mountain Marauders.

"One man in a surprise is worth a dozen," he said, as he rode rapidly toward the scene.

Suddenly he drew rein, for through a vista in the trees he had caught a quick glance of a thrilling picture.

What he saw was a man in the blue uniform with a rope about his neck, and the other end was fast to the horn of a saddle on the back of a black steed.

Beyond in the background were three horses, and in the group of human beings were three men dressed in black, the garb of the Mountain Marauders, and one young girl.

As Dashing Charlie gazed he saw the black horse moved forward, and the officer was raised off his feet into the air.

The scout waited no longer, but quickly sprung to the ground, his rifle went up to his shoulder, and a sharp report followed the touch of his finger upon the trigger.

Then he threw himself into the saddle and rode for the scene.

But a deep cut in the earth headed him off, and he had to ride around it.

As he did so he beheld two men on foot seeking safety in flight, and once more he halted and raised his rifle.

One man rolled over in the dirt at his shot, while the other halted quickly at his loud command:

"Halt and hands up!"

Then Dashing Charlie rode forward, and a moment after drew rein upon the scene.

What he saw first was the effect of his long-range shot, for it had cut the rope and the officer had fallen to the ground, where he lay half-dazed with the severe choking he had received, while his hands were ironed behind him.

A young girl had sprung to his side, but her hands were pinioned and she could render no service.

There were two outlaws there, one moaning over a wound in his leg, from the scout's rifle, the other standing near him, his hands raised above his head.

Afar off, going at full speed from the scene was a horseman, and following him were three riderless horses.

Dead upon the ground were the bodies of two soldiers and one outlaw.

The reader will recognize the group as Lieutenant Gibbs, Beatrice Markham, and the two outlaws, with Muello, the chief, in the distance making his escape, for he had thrown himself upon his horse at the shot, believing the soldiers from the fort were upon him, and the unfastened horses of his men had gone after him, leaving the two frightened outlaws on foot.

"Well, it seems I have come just in time, and I've a mind to send a bullet into both of you," cried Dashing Charlie, as he gazed upon the thrilling picture before him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

"You are Dashing Charlie, the scout, sir, my father's friend?" and Beatrice Markham sprung toward the gallant rescuer.

"Yes, miss, I am Dashing Charlie, and glad I am to meet you again, Miss Markham, to find you here with Lieutenant Gibbs, who I sincerely hope is not hurt much."

"I am all right, Dashing Charlie," came hoarsely from the lieutenant as he staggered to his feet.

Then he added:

"Thank Heaven you came!"

"You were just in time."

"Yes, just in time," repeated Beatrice.

"Down upon your faces, both of you!" and the scout turned to the two outlaws, who quietly obeyed, while one whined:

"I'm wounded, pard."

"You will soon regret you were not killed."

"Had that mule not protected you that bullet would have entered your heart."

"Now who was it that got away?"

"One of our pards."

"It was the king-bee of deviltry, I know; but another time for him."

"Yes, Charlie, it was Muello, the Mexican, who has been on the watch for us."

"We found we were ambushed, so the guide went with the rest of the party by the way of Bad Lands, and I came this way on foot with Miss Markham and these two brave fellows of my company, who were shot down without mercy."

"The chief sought to force from Miss Markham, by hanging me, the secret of where her father had buried that fatal legacy of gold from Matt Markham, the Miner."

"I supposed all was over, when you came to our rescue."

"Now, what is to be done?"

"Just this, Lieutenant Gibbs: that Miss Markham takes my horse and rides with all speed to the fort, while you and I, with the aid of these two outlaws, whom I will force to fight, will have to stand off Indians."

"Indians?"

"Yes, sir; there are a band of a dozen of them coming on my trail."

"I sighted them as I came here, and they are not half a dozen miles away."

"This is strange—and so near the fort."

"True, sir; but Miss Markham must go at once."

"I will not desert my defenders," said Beatrice, firmly.

"But you go as a courier, to send a rescue party to our aid."

"No; I do not know the way, so let Lieutenant Gibbs be the one to go."

"Miss Markham, I have a horse which no man other than myself can ride, and I fear me he might give you trouble; but we must try."

"I will not go."

"I have my rifle, and can aid equally as well as those outlaws, so you go, Dashing Charlie," was the firm response of Beatrice.

"Let us compromise, then, Dashing Charlie."

"Yes, lieutenant."

"You go, and carry Miss Markham behind you, for I know well what that horse of yours can do."

"I can take to the rocks, there, with these two outlaws, who must fight to save their lives and scalps, and we can stand off the red-skins until you bring aid."

"Then that will be it, lieutenant, and we must be off at once."

And, turning to the outlaws, he said:

"See here: you will have to fight, or go under."

"Do your duty, and you shall go free; but play the traitor, and I'll hunt you to your graves."

"Do you hear?"

"We hear."

"Will you fight?"

"You bet."

"I don't want ter let go o' my scalp, yer kin bet on it."

"Then unlock the irons on the wrists of Lieutenant Gibbs, and stand ready to obey his orders—Hark!"

"The Indians are coming along rapidly, Charlie," cried the lieutenant, as a war-whoop was heard.

"Yes, but I will ride in full sight of them and try and draw them away from you."

"Now, Miss Markham, permit me to raise you to the saddle."

"Am I not to ride behind you?"

"No, I go behind, for my tough hide will serve as a pin-cushion for Indian arrows," was the laughing reply.

Beatrice would have urged against being thus protected, but the scout raised her to his saddle, leaped up behind her, and called out:

"Remember, you men, I'll track you down if you play it sharp on the lieutenant."

"Stand 'em off, lieutenant, and I'll soon bring aid—good-by!"

With a word to his splendid roan he was away, and he rode out of the timber at a sweeping gallop.

He bore directly toward the coming band of red-skins, and soon had them in full view.

There were some twenty of them, mounted and following his own trail.

They saw him as he dashed out of the timber, and instantly there was a loud chorus of war-cries, while they rode toward him at full speed, sending a shower of arrows as they came.

"Just out of range," said Dashing Charlie, coolly, yet at the same time he put his hand around and drew an arrow from his back, for it had just entered the flesh deep enough to cling there.

"Now, Comanche, show them your heels in your best style," he added, and the splendid roan leaped forward at a tremendous pace, and the ride for life had begun.

The Indians were well mounted, too, their horses being fresh, and though carrying a double load, Comanche could have dropped them more rapidly; but Dashing Charlie did not wish to discourage his pursuers by leaving them too far behind, but rather to draw them after him and away from Lieutenant Gibbs and his two outlaw allies.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

"THOSE red-skins must be backed by a large force, to press on thus near the fort."

"What can the fort scouts be doing not to have discovered red-skins about?" said Dashing Charlie, more to himself than to his fair companion.

"The fort cannot be far from here, sir."

"No, Miss Markham; just six miles from the hill ahead of us, and when we have ridden four miles of the distance my revolver can attract attention and send us aid, for we can be seen."

"Your horse seems untiring—he is a splendid animal."

"There is none better upon the border, Miss Markham; but I will spare him here at this hill."

And the scout leaped to the ground and ran alongside of the roan to the top of the hill.

There was a long descent upon the other side, and he still remained on foot, turning and glancing back at the coming Indians.

They were stretched out in single file now, according to the speed of their horses, and were just twenty-one in number.

"We have drawn them away from the lieutenant, at any rate, and I can get aid to him within an hour and a half," said the scout, as he ran alongside of the roan in the descending trail.

"But the Indians?"

"I do not believe they will venture within three miles of the fort, Miss Markham, and they would not dare do that, unless they had a larger force behind them and night was near."

"I only hope the larger force will not come upon Lieutenant Gibbs."

"Yes, I sincerely hope so."

"Should they not, do you suppose he will be able to master those two outlaws?"

"Oh, yes; for there is no pluckier man on the border than the lieutenant, and he is a good plainsman as well, and up to the cunning of outlaws and Indians alike."

"Then, too, he knows how to use his weapons, and is a giant in strength."

"I have no fear for him where those two men are concerned, Miss Markham."

"How fortunate we were to have you so near us."

"It was an accident only, for I was following a trail and came upon a spot which commanded a view of the situation in the timber."

"Had not the chief gotten away with those horses, we would have had no trouble."

"He is a fearful man, Mr. Emmett, merciless as death; but let me tell you how often my poor father spoke of you when he was dying, and recalled your valuable services to him—services I can never repay, I fear."

"I did but my duty, Miss Markham, and you have my deepest sympathy in your grief, I assure you; but now I will give Comanche a swallow of water at this creek and then mount again."

"You need have no further fear, for we are safe now," and after a halt of a few minutes, Dashing Charlie again leaped to the back of his horse.

The Indians now came over the top of the hill, and on the down-trail pushed their ponies to greater speed, causing Dashing Charlie to urge Comanche the faster, as there was danger of their coming in range again.

But, after a run of a couple of miles more, the red-skins were seen to draw rein.

"I thought so, for they are too near the fort for comfort."

"Now, Comanche, I can help you a little, and the scout sprang to the ground and ran easily along by the side of his horse."

"I fear you are tiring yourself, sir, very much."

"Oh no, I am used to it, miss, and can go in a trot all day."

"Do you see yonder hill?"

"Yes, sir."

"When we reach there, we can see the fort."

In five minutes more they reached the spot, and at once Dashing Charlie began to fire his repeating-rifle, while Beatrice waved her veiled sombrero around and around her head.

Almost instantly there was seen a puff of white smoke on the lookout at one corner of the stockade wall, and indistinctly came the sound of a distant shot, followed by the notes of a bugle and roll of a drum.

"We are all right now, and I'll give Comanche a rest until they come, so will wait here."

"But we must keep up our signals to urge them to full speed."

It was just five minutes by the scout's watch before a company of cavalry dashed out of the stockade gate of the fort and came at a gallop toward the hill.

But Dashing Charlie and Beatrice still continued their signals for haste, and the officer in command urged his men on more rapidly.

Then, too, another company of cavalry followed the second one, showing that the fort was fully alarmed.

"Twelve minutes will fetch them here, miss," said Dashing Charlie.

And in just that time Captain Langley Arleigh of the cavalry dashed up a hundred feet ahead of his men.

"Hello, Dashing Charlie! it is you?" cried the handsome young officer, as he drew rein.

"Yes, Captain Arleigh, and I beg to present Miss Markham, the colonel's niece, and to state that there are Indians on our trail, twenty-one in number, with more to back them up, I am sure, while Lieutenant Gibbs is corraled ten miles from here in some timber with two of the Mountain Marauders as allies."

"I will guide you there, sir, if you will send Miss Markham under escort to the fort."

The officer bowed with marked courtesy to Beatrice and said:

"I am glad to be first to welcome you to the fort, Miss Markham, and congratulate you upon falling into such safe hands as Dashing Charlie."

"Permit me to present Lieutenant Henry, Miss Markham, who will escort you to the fort and report to Colonel Buckner just what Dashing Charlie has said."

"I will ride on to the rescue of our gallant friend Gibbs."

"I am ready, Dashing Charlie."

Lieutenant Henry at once dismounted a trooper and placed Beatrice in his saddle, while he, with two men, returned to the fort with her, Captain Arleigh riding rapidly on with the scout to the rescue of Lieutenant Gibbs.

"The fort scouts must have a raking over, Dashing Charlie, not to have reported red-skins near, and I only hope we will be in time to save Gibbs."

"Tell me again just the situation, please," said Captain Arleigh as they rode side by side at a rapid gallop, the troopers thundering along behind.

Dashing Charlie quickly explained the situation as he knew it, and the horses were urged to still greater speed to reach the spot where Lieutenant Gibbs had been left.

A trooper was sent back with orders to the next company to keep within supporting distance, and for a man to be dispatched to the fort ordering out reinforcements of a couple of light guns and some infantry.

Captain Arleigh was a fine soldier, and not one to spare man or beast in going to the rescue of any one, so he kept his company on the run right through.

The trail of the red-skins who had pursued Dashing Charlie was soon found, and a mile further they were discovered just as a force three times their number were joining them, but all took to flight at the determined rush of the cavalrymen.

Pressing on the troopers at last reached the spot where Lieutenant Gibbs and the outlaws had been left, and just as twilight fell.

But the officer and the outlaws were not there.

In some mysterious manner they had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BLUE-COATS AND RED-SKINS.

It was a great disappointment to Dashing Charlie to find Lieutenant Gibbs gone from the spot where they had left him.

The Indians had once or twice made a stand to show battle, but the determined rush of the fifty cavalrymen had sent them flying each time, and they had branched off to the left instead of following the trail which would have carried them through the timber where Lieutenant Gibbs had been left.

They halted half a mile away, when they saw that Captain Arleigh did not follow them, and made a stand once more as though to give battle.

Panting like hounds the horses of the blue-coats had been drawn up on the scene so nearly fatal to the colonel's gallant aide de camp.

The order was given to dismount and unsaddle, to give the horses a breathing-spell, while a picket was thrown out on foot to watch the Indians.

There lay the two dead soldiers, and the outlaw who was slain by Lieutenant Gibbs.

But no sign of the officer and the live outlaws could be found.

"Here are tracks made since I left."

"I fear, sir, the outlaw chief returned with his men and thus got Lieutenant Gibbs in a close place," said Dashing Charlie.

"And killed him?" anxiously asked the captain.

"Oh, no, sir, they would not do that unless compelled to from his resistance, for Miss Markham escaped them and they depend upon the lieutenant to discover the secret hiding-place of that gold Captain Markham buried."

"True, and I am glad that it is so; but it is too late to see trails now?"

"Yes, sir, so I would go into camp, after sending me one back to meet the other company and troops coming, and I will go on foot to reconnoiter the red-skins."

"You must be well-nigh worn down, Dashing Charlie, and I can send some one else."

"Oh, no, sir, I am all right, and I prefer to have the situation for myself."

"You don't think the Indians could have captured poor Gibbs?"

"There is proof that they did not, sir, the dead not being scalped."

"Oh, yes; but we can do nothing for him, you think?"

"Not until morning, sir, when we can take up his trail from here."

"And now you deem it best to watch the Indians?"

"I do, sir, for you saw that those who pursued me had a support of treble their number, and these others are doubtless reinforced by a couple of hundred more, else they would never have ventured so near the fort."

"Well, you know, Dashing Charlie, so do as you deem best."

"I will wait here, for my horses need rest after their tremendous race, but by morning we will be ready for a fight or pursuit."

"Yes, sir, and we may need all the troops that can be spared from the fort."

With this Dashing Charlie, having stripped Comanche of his saddle and bridle, given him a hard rubbing and turned him loose to feed,

started off on foot for his reconnoissance of the Indian position.

He knew as well how to outcunning a red-skin as an Indian himself, having lived among them for years, and so went to work as he deemed best.

Hours passed away before his return, and Captain Arleigh, sleeping with his cloak about him and his saddle for a pillow, started as he felt a touch upon his arm.

"Ah, Charlie, it is you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what have you discovered?"

"The Indians are camped at the mouth of Canyon Valley, sir, and have their scouts reconnoitering your frontier, intending to make an attack at dawn, for I am sure they do not think you suspect them of being in force, and they do not know that you have reinforcements over the range, for I headed off the troops there, as I sent you word."

"Yes, Captain Dunn is there with two, A and D Companies of cavalry, and two pieces of light artillery, while Captain Dana is camped in his rear with three companies of mounted infantry, so you see, with my men I have three hundred men to draw upon, for I am in command."

"I am glad you are to command, sir, and you will need every man you have, while it would be well to send back to the fort for other troops to march as far as the range to be within call."

"Why, Charlie, how many red-skins have we got to fight?" asked the captain, with a laugh.

"Nearly a thousand, sir, for I counted their ponies."

"Ah! you were bold to do this; but this does look serious, and I will act upon your suggestion at once," and Captain Arleigh hastily wrote a note to Colonel Buckner and dispatched it by a courier to the fort, telling him to get a fresh horse at each of the commands he came to.

"Now, sir, I would like to make a suggestion?"

"Certainly, Charlie, for your suggestions are as good advice as I wish."

"Leave your camp, sir, and fall back to yonder hill."

"When the Indians rush in upon you, then charge down upon them, and have Captain Dunn be under arms ready to attack on their flank, Captain Dana pressing them in front with artillery and his mounted infantry, for we have no time to get to their rear."

"It is a wise plan, and shall at once be acted upon."

"Now get what sleep you can, for I will need you when the blue-coats and red-skins get at it."

Acting upon this advice, Dashing Charlie was soon fast asleep, for he knew that Captain Arleigh was not a man to be caught napping.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SURPRISE.

THE night dragged along to the waiting soldiers, after they had moved their camp from the timber to a hill-top a quarter of a mile away, the men sleeping upon their arms and with their horses staked out near, saddled, but with bridles hung upon the pommels.

There were scouts sent on from the fort, put out in the timber to fall back at the approach of the red-skins and silently warn the troopers of their coming, and men had been sent to the commands of Captain Dunn and Dana to be ready to move at the first sound of attack.

Dashing Charlie was sleeping serenely when Captain Arleigh called to him.

"I am ready, sir."

"The scouts say that the Indians are creeping up to the timber on foot, while their horses are being led in supporting distance behind them."

"I think we have them as we want them, sir," answered Dashing Charlie, and he went to saddle his horse, the order being passed along for the troopers to do the same.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed away and then there came a burst of yells that were like a chorus of lost souls, as the red-skins sprung up from the ground and made a rush into the timber, expecting to surprise their white foes.

But the yells ceased as suddenly as they had begun, when they discovered the camps deserted, while down upon them rained a shower of lead from the carbines of the troopers stationed back upon the hill.

Then the bugle sounded the charge, and with cheers the boys in blue dashed down the hill in an irresistible avalanche.

The surprisers were thus surprised, and a panic followed, the red-skins flying back to their ponies, leaving their dead and dying upon the field.

But hot upon their heels pressed the troopers, while on the left were heard cheers as Captain Dunn's men rode to the attack on the Indian flank, and the valley was illumined as two red flashes were seen and the roar of the guns sent the echoes through the hills and mountains.

The shrieking shells went flying back into the mass of red-skins, bursting with deafening explosion and showering death around them.

The day had dawned now and revealed the Indians in full flight through the Canyon Val-

ley, many of them afoot, and the plain dotted with their frightened ponies running about riderless.

The young officer in command of the two guns saw his chance and rode like the wind to a high point commanding the pass, and here unlimbering, began to toss his shells over the heads of the charging soldiers right into the midst of the Indians.

The result was an utter panic, a stampede, and the red-skins fled for their lives, with no thought of resistance.

They had intended making a stand in the pass, knowing that they could not be flanked there for hours, but those terrible "horse-guns," as they called the artillery, frightened them into seeking safety in flight alone.

Hot on their heels pressed Captain Arleigh and his troop, supported by the commands of Captains Dunn and Dana, while the mounted infantry brought up the rear.

Then there was a dash again of the two guns, and the battery swept to the front at a run, unlimbered in the pass and kept the red-skins on the jump for the mountains.

All along the way there were strewn dead warriors and their ponies, with here and there a wounded brave, too badly crippled to get away.

"You were right, Dashing Charlie, there were all of a thousand of them, and but for your warning, as they were not known to be near, they could have given us a great deal of trouble at the fort and cost many lives."

"As it is, we have not lost one to ten what they have."

"You deserve the credit of this victory, Dashing Charlie."

"It is kind of you to say so, sir; but I do not believe the red-skins will stop running to-day, for the big guns scared them half to death."

"And Maddox handled them so splendidly, too."

"I am proud of my command, I assure you; but what about poor Gibbs?"

"I was going to say, sir, as I would not be needed longer, I would return to the timber and look up his trail from there."

"Yes, I wish you would, for I shall push on for some miles to keep the red-skins moving, but will return and camp to-night where we did last night, as it will be better not to go back to the fort before to-morrow."

"You know best, Captain Arleigh; but I will leave you word of any discovery I may make of Lieutenant Gibbs, for I will carry one of the scouts along with me."

"Do so; in fact, take as many as you think necessary."

"One will do for the present, sir, but I will send to you if I need aid."

With this Dashing Charlie rode back over the trail, dotted with the dead red-skins and their horses.

He had called to a scout to accompany him, a youth known as Kit Kirby, and who was a gallant young fellow who had given up a pleasant home for a wild life upon the plains.

"Well, Captain Charlie, we gave them a surprise that time, did we not?" said Kit Kirby, addressing the scout by name as he was known to the men at the fort, for he was captain of "The Buckskins," as the score of scouts at Fort Blank were called.

"Yes, Kit, and a whipping they will not soon forget."

"How is it that the scouts let them get this near the fort and made no report of it?"

"We were off to the northward, sir, and only came in yesterday."

"Were none of the scouts at the fort?"

"Dick Darling was there, sir, and he promised to keep a lookout for us; but then he is the private scout of that Hunter Sport at the fort, and is always at his heels, so is no good."

"I never thought Dick Darling was worth much as a scout; but who is this Hunter Sport you speak of?"

"He's a gent from Texas, who has come to the fort for sport."

"His name is Grayson Gurney, and he had a cabin built all for himself, and is a very rich man they say."

"Most of the time he is off on a hunt, and he's a dandy, the officers say, for they all like him."

"And Dick Darling is his guide now, you say?"

"Yes, sir; he offered him big wages, so Dick went with him."

"Well, here we are at the timber, and now we are to find Lieutenant Gibbs's trail."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAIL.

THE spot where Dashing Charlie was to set out upon his solution of the mystery, as to what had become of Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs, was a heavily-timbered rise in the center of a valley.

In front of it was a lofty mountain-range, some three miles distant, and in the rear the land stretched away to hill-land and plains.

Upon either side were ranges of foot-hills, so that a good view could be had of the valley from that point.

The Canyon Valley Pass, some five miles away, was visible, and hence the line of battle with the Indians from start to finish.

The valley sloped away toward the rugged range, and there disappeared.

It was in this direction that the trail of Lieutenant Gibbs led.

It was the way also that Muello, the Mexican, had fled, with the three horses of the outlaws following.

"Now, Kit, keep your eyes open, for we must find the lieutenant," and Dashing Charlie gave the young scout an idea of just how matters were.

"Yes, Captain Charlie, we must find him, sure," responded Kit Kirby, and both scouts dismounted and set to work searching for the trail.

Now and then afar off beyond the pass resounded the shot of a piece of artillery, showing that Lieutenant Maddox was keeping his guns up with the cavalry in the pursuit of the redskins.

In the valley there were troops engaged in making a camp and seeing to the dead and wounded.

But unheeding these scenes, Dashing Charlie and Kit Kirby went on with their work.

Their horses followed them as they went along on the search for the trail.

The tracks of Muello, the Mexican, in his flight, and of the three horses Kit Kirby followed, while Dashing Charlie took up the trail of the lieutenant.

He made the discovery that the officer and the two outlaws had left the place afoot, going down the valley.

A walk of a mile brought him to a spot where there had been a struggle, and further on lay two dead forms.

In an instant the scout had sprung to their side, while he gave a shrill whistle to call Kit Kirby, who was some distance away on the trail of Muello, the Mexican.

The two bodies were the outlaws, left with the lieutenant.

One of these had a bullet in the center of his forehead, the other a knife-thrust in his heart.

There had evidently been a desperate struggle there, for the ground was all cut up with boot-tracks deeply indented in the earth.

From there there were visible only the tracks of one man, the high-heeled boots of Lieutenant Gibbs having made them, Dashing Charlie said, for there were the spur-marks also where the ground was soft and the foot-mark deeper.

"See here, Kit."

"Yes, Captain Charlie."

"Why did the lieutenant go in this direction?"

"It is from the fort."

"It certainly is."

"He could not but know the way."

"You could not lose him."

"I don't understand it."

"Nor do I."

They continued their search, and set it down that the men had attacked the officer, he had killed them both, and then continued on foot down the valley away from the fort instead of toward it.

"He may have been badly wounded and hardly conscious of what he was doing," said Dashing Charlie.

"That must have been it, and I only hope we will find him alive."

So on they went, until Dashing Charlie made another discovery.

"See here, Kit."

"Yes."

"I am a heavier man than Lieutenant Gibbs, and yet my footprint does not sink so deep in this soft ground as his does."

"Nor does mine."

"No."

"Isn't it strange?"

"Yes."

"Can you account for it?"

"Only by his carrying a heavy load."

"Those men back yonder had no arms."

"No, he must have taken their weapons; but that would hardly have added the weight to make their tracks so much deeper."

"I should not think so."

Again they moved on, until Dashing Charlie bade Kit Kirby go back to the trail he had been following.

This he did, and half a mile further down the valley the two scouts met.

"Well, Kit, here we are."

"Yes; I have followed the tracks of Muello's horse and the three others."

"And they meet the lieutenant's trail here; but see! the horses were halted here."

"Yes; and hitched to these trees."

"Kit, I am afraid the lieutenant ran upon the outlaw chief here, he having halted and ambushed him."

"No; for the foot-tracks go on down the valley."

"You are right; but we will follow them, for the trail of the horses goes the same way."

"Yes, captain."

And down the valley they continued, their horses patiently following them, until they came

to the border of a deep and swiftly-flowing stream within narrow banks.

"The trails lead into the water here, Kit?"

"Yes, and so do the boot-tracks."

"We must mount and swim across."

"Yes, sir, for then will we find out if they go on."

Mounting their horses, they swam them across the stream, coming out just where the trails of the four horses they followed did.

But there were no boot-tracks there, and hunt up and down as they might, no trace of the lieutenant's footsteps could be found.

Completely puzzled, the two scouts sat down to consider the solving of the mystery of the trail.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNSOLVED.

For some time the two scouts pondered over the mystery of what had become of Lieutenant Gibbs.

There were his tracks leading to the stream and entering the water, but they did not appear upon the other side at any point.

At last Dashing Charlie said:

"Kit, you go back to the command and tell Captain Arleigh just what we have found out, and failed to discover, and ask him to send me every scout he can spare, while I would be glad to have him come and investigate if he will."

Away went Kit Kirby back to the command, some three miles, and Dashing Charlie again set to work to see what he could find out of the mystery.

He searched the banks up the stream for a short distance, knowing it would not be possible for a fine swimmer even to go against that current far.

Then down the stream he went for half a mile.

But there was no trace of a landing of the booted feet.

Thinking that perhaps the officer might have come out again upon the other shore, the same he had started from, he swam Comanche back again and renewed the search.

But all without avail.

"If Lieutenant Gibbs entered this stream, it was because he had been wounded in the head and did not know what he was doing, and that means that he went to his death."

"If Muello the Mexican had captured him, he would have ridden, for the outlaw certainly had caught the horses of his men, which ran off when he did, for back on the trail are the signs of where he hitched them."

"It is just a notch or two above my calculation, to get at this mystery; but, I do hope the lieutenant is not dead, or lying somewhere badly wounded."

"Well, I will cross the stream and go upon another still hunt," and Dashing Charlie again rode Comanche into the stream.

He then took off his saddle and bridle and turned him loose to feed, wishing to give him all the care he could, while it was in his power to do so.

Continuing on after the trail of the outlaw horses, Dashing Charlie suddenly came to a stop and gave a low whistle.

"Aha! this is a go, for I know these tracks rather well, or one of them at least."

He was looking down at the tracks of the horses which just then came onto the other trail from around the base of the mountain spur and coming down the bank of the stream.

"Well, I left off this trail to go the rescue of Lieutenant Gibbs and Miss Markham, and right here it comes across my track again."

"I will be in luck to take it up again, when I feared I would have to give the counterfeiter up altogether."

"I only wish he would go to the fort and play the part of my Double."

"Yes, he has moved around the spur, following the stream, and the trail he is now on will take him along Robbers' Range, and perhaps on to the Valley Camps again."

"If he goes by way of Robbers' Range then he must be one of Muello the Mexican's band, for no other man could go through in safety."

"I will see if he heads on up the range."

For a quarter of a mile the scout went on, discovering that the counterfeiter had passed after Muello and his horses, and they were both keeping to the same trail.

But as far as he went he did not find any other trace of the missing lieutenant.

Turning back he reached the stream just as Captain Arleigh rode up, accompanied by a squad of cavalry and six scouts, guided there by Kit Kirby.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, Captain Dunn has driven the red-skins many miles and will camp on their trail, returning to-morrow."

"Our victory was a grand one, and I owe much to you; but what news of Lieutenant Gibbs?" and Captain Arleigh dismounted and went with the scout to the ford.

"You see, sir, here are the lieutenant's tracks, and we trailed them from the timber where I left him with the two outlaws."

"Over in the thicket on the hillside there, are the bodies of the two outlaws, and these I am

sure Lieutenant Gibbs killed; but I fear he was wounded and in a dazed sort of way came to the stream here and wandered in.

"The trail of Muello with the horses of his outlaws, cross here, and come out on the other shore there by that lightning-blasted tree; but not anywhere on the other side is the foot-track of the lieutenant, and the soft ground would readily show it."

"This looks bad; but I hope we can find him."

"I hope so, sir; but after Kit went for you I found another trail, and one which I was following when I went to the rescue of Lieutenant Gibbs and Miss Markham."

"I recognized the trail by the very peculiar hoof-marks of one of the horses."

"This trail was made after Muello went along and goes into the Robbers' Range."

"Now, sir, I would like to set the scouts to work until dark and see what they can make of it all."

"Do so at once, and may they make some discovery which may have escaped your keen eyes," said the captain.

The scouts, and the soldiers too were at once set to work upon the trails; but night came on and when they assembled in camp not one of them could tell more than had already been discovered by Dashing Charlie.

So the two outlaws were buried, and Captain Arleigh returned to the camp in the valley, while Dashing Charlie and Kit Kirby went into camp upon the outlaw chief's trail.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HEROINE'S WELCOME.

LIEUTENANT HENRY felt proud of the honor of becoming the escort of Beatrice Markham to the fort, though had he been consulted he would have preferred to go and fight the red-skins, being a young officer anxious to win his spurs.

But then he had no idea that there would be a battle; so did not disturb himself greatly for having to turn back, especially as he had under his charge the most beautiful girl it had ever been his pleasure to meet.

The coming of Beatrice had been regarded at the fort as an omen of the greatest importance.

She was the colonel's niece, and to become his adopted daughter.

Then she was an heiress in her own right, while it was supposed that she would also inherit the fortune of the colonel.

Added to these riches, she was said to be very beautiful, as judged by a photograph of her given Colonel Buckner by her father when he visited him at the fort.

The photograph was taken in riding habit, and revealed a very handsome form as well as lovely face, and as she was a Texan, she naturally rode splendidly, while it had become whispered around that she was a dead shot, could throw a lasso unerringly, and yet was a fine musician and sung divinely.

In fact, she was expected to be the greatest attraction the fort could boast of.

So when it was known that Lieutenant Guy Henry was returning escorting a young lady, the truth was surmised at once, and there was a gathering of the clans to meet the heroine, the officers' wives and daughters being most anxious to extend her a warm greeting.

"Your coming has been looked forward to with much pleasure, Miss Markham, by all of us. I assure you, and there is not a young officer in the fort who has not envied Gibbs his mission to fetch you," said Lieutenant Henry, as they rode along together.

"He is hardly to be envied just now, Lieutenant Henry, and I only hope he may escape from his present danger."

"But I thank you for your kind words, and hope I will be able to show my appreciation of the sympathy Lieutenant Gibbs told me all felt for me."

"All do extend you their heartfelt sympathy, Miss Markham; but I assure you that you will fall in love with your uncle, as we all have done."

"Now let me congratulate you upon your escape from the dangers of the trail, and I believe that Gibbs alone could have gotten you through in safety."

"He did his best; but, alas! but for the scout known as Dashing Charlie, he would have lost his life."

"I owe much to that brave man, Lieutenant Henry."

"So do all of us, Miss Markham."

"He is a marvel, and was most popular at the fort, which, however, he left some months ago for some reason he never made known, I believe."

"And my uncle is well, I hope, Lieutenant Henry?"

"Oh, yes; he is always well, I believe; but, did you lose all your traps when taken by the outlaws?"

"No, I hope not, for they went with the guide and two soldiers around by what they called the Bad Lands, and my quadroon maid Jophine was with them."

"I hope sincerely they escaped."

"We will know when we reach the fort, as

they will come in by the eastern trail; but, see! there gather the soldiers to give you a cheer, a deserved one, too, to a heroine and the colonel's daughter.

They soon arrived at the stockade-wall, the gates were thrown open, while every eye was upon Beatrice, who, in spite of riding a trooper's saddle, sat upon her horse with grace and confidence.

"It is Miss Markham!" cried an officer, recognizing her from her photograph.

And at once a wild cheer of welcome burst forth, which Beatrice acknowledged by a low bow, as she urged her horse on straight for headquarters, led by Lieutenant Henry, who felt himself a hero.

The whole fort was a scene of excitement, for the troops were preparing for the march and defense, and the colonel was busy at his quarters, until he was told that Lieutenant Henry was approaching and the lady with him was doubtless Miss Markham.

Instantly he arose and went to the door, and one look revealed to him a face that took him back to the far bygone when he had gazed into the beautiful face of his sister, Beatrice.

"Her image," he muttered, and extending his arms he lifted her from the saddle, while he drew her to his breast with the words:

"Welcome, my child, into your new father's heart, for you are to be my dear daughter now."

Beatrice could only reply:

"Yes, you are my father now."

Then she was led into the headquarters, where several of the officers ran over to greet her and bid her welcome, and the pretty Texan's heart was full as she felt that she was no longer alone in the world.

To add to her joy, an orderly reported the arrival of the guide and two soldiers with Jophine, and the pack-horses, for they had made the ride in safety, though barely escaping the pursuing outlaws, who had daringly followed them almost within sight of the fort.

"Oh, Jophine! I am so glad you escaped," cried Beatrice, as she greeted her maid, who, with her large eyes full of tears, answered quickly:

"Miss Beatrice, if you had been killed, I would have wanted to die."

A few minutes after, Beatrice found herself in her pretty rooms at headquarters, and she knew that everything had been done for her comfort and happiness.

In the mean time couriers had arrived from Captain Arleigh, calling for more troops, and they were dispatched with all haste to the front, with scouts and an ambulance train, for it was now felt that a severe battle must be fought, as the red-skins were reported in heavy force.

And soon after nightfall a courier arrived with the news that Lieutenant Fred Gibbs could not be found, and a shadow fell upon all as Beatrice told the story of their adventure with the merciless outlaw chief, Muello, the Mexican.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SCOUTS' RETURN.

THE night wore away at the fort with considerable anxiety felt by all, for now that Indians were reported as being near, rumors came in that they were several thousand in number, and that they were to attack the fort.

Colonel Buckner sent scouts out to reconnoiter in every direction, while he threw heavy guards out as advance posts and kept all the troops within under arms.

The news came to him from the front, Captain Arleigh having written him, as is known to the reader, the exact situation, and all the men asked for had been sent.

The colonel knew that if there were more men needed he would receive word, and he had full confidence in Captain Arleigh.

What Dashing Charlie was doing there he could not surmise, unless he had been on his way to the fort to report the coming of the red-skins, having in some way discovered the fact.

That Dashing Charlie was there gave him great satisfaction, for he well knew what the scout was.

Of course he was worried at the story of Beatrice, of how Lieutenant Gibbs had been left, and so were all else who heard of it, yet they could not see what else could have been done under the circumstances.

The officers shook their heads ominously when talking of Lieutenant Gibbs's situation, but the colonel said cheerily:

"Gibbs is the man to extricate himself from a dilemma if any one can, and I have every belief that he will turn up all right in good time."

Tired as she was supposed to be after her long ride and all that she had gone through with, Beatrice held quite a reception in the colonel's parlor, for all the officers and their families dropped in upon her to bid her welcome, and Colonel Buckner felt gratified at their kindness.

Then Lieutenant Henry got the band to go

up and serenade her, after which she was allowed to seek repose.

"I tell you, Miss Beatrice, this place is going to be mighty nice," said Jophine, that night, as she was aiding her young mistress in getting ready to retire.

"There's a company of colored soldiers here, too," she added, "and the sergeant is as handsome as a picture."

"I have already made his acquaintance through the colonel's cook."

"Yes, Jophine, I feel that I shall like army life, and then, too, all are so kind to me."

"But I do so dread evil to Lieutenant Gibbs."

"He can take care of himself, Miss Beatrice, never fear," were Jophine's encouraging words, and the handsome quadroon maid bade her mistress good-night and sought her own room near by.

But though the fort sunk into comparative quiet after midnight, just at dawn there was a distant sound that aroused one and all.

It was the deep booming of the guns under Lieutenant Maddox, and the rattling of the rifles of the mounted infantry.

Up the valley the sounds of battle swept and were driven across the plains to the fort, for the wind came from that direction.

Louder and more rapidly became the firing, and all knew that a fierce battle was raging with the red-skins.

Colonel Buckner buckled on his sword and had his horse ready to ride to the scene if needed, while his staff gathered at headquarters.

Breakfast was served early, and the comments were that the firing was receding rapidly.

"Brave Arleigh is driving them at all points," said the colonel.

"And Maddox is firing his gun so rapidly, one would think he had his whole battery upon the field," Major Baron returned.

Further and further off the sounds were heard, and all knew that the troops had gained a victory ere news arrived of it, and there was great rejoicing.

But there was suspense and sorrow, also, for who had lost a husband, brother, father, lover or friend?

That was the question in every heart.

At last a horseman was seen coming toward the fort at full speed.

He dashed up to headquarters, his horse panting and covered with foam.

It was a courier, and he said, with a salute to the colonel:

"Captain Arleigh's compliments, sir, and he told me to report that he had met the red-skins, a thousand warriors strong, and had whipped them from the field, stampeding them through Valley Canyon, sir."

"This is glorious news, Sergeant Gray; but what of the losses?"

"The Indians suffered heavily, and we captured half of their horses, while the troops lost but few killed and wounded."

"They intended a surprise, sir, but Captain Arleigh beat them at their own game."

"He will send a full report later, sir."

"I thank you, Sergeant Gray, for the good news you bring."

"Now go to your quarters, for you need rest," said the colonel.

And the fort rung with cheers at the good news.

Later came a note from Captain Arleigh telling of the victory, and the names of one officer killed and two wounded were given, with a list of half a dozen men on the slain list and a score wounded more or less.

In a postscript he said that Dashing Charlie deserved highest praise, and was then searching for Lieutenant Gibbs.

When night came again, another report came stating that the red-skins were utterly stampeded and, pursuing them, Captain Dunn had camped on the trail, with the mounted infantry and artillery held in reserve at Valley Canyon.

Upon the morrow they would march back to the fort, but that thus far the news regarding Lieutenant Gibbs was by no means favorable to his safety.

This news cast a shadow upon the fort, for Fred Gibbs was liked by all, and when the next day Captain Arleigh returned with his men, the joy of his reception was clouded by the news that he brought of the finding of the two dead outlaws and no trace of the dashing officer other than his foot-tracks leading to the stream.

That Dashing Charlie had gone on in search of the missing officer, along with Kit Kirby, gave a ray of hope to all.

But that night, as the bugle was sounding "Lights out," the two scouts rode into the fort and reported to Colonel Buckner that their search had been in vain, for no clue could be found to the fate of the gallant young officer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE COLONEL AND THE SCOUT.

COLONEL BUCKNER received Dashing Charlie in his private quarters where he was sitting with his adopted daughter.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, I am indeed glad to see you, for I am most anxious to thank you for

your great service to my daughter, and she, too, wishes to express her gratitude," and the colonel grasped the hand of the scout and wrung it warmly.

Before Dashing Charlie could reply, Beatrice Markham grasped his hand and said with deepest feeling:

"Yes, I owe you more than life, more than words can express."

"I feel that I am repaid in having served you, Miss Markham, while the colonel knows that I simply did my duty as a soldier; but I am happy in seeing you at the fort, safe and well."

"I feel that I shall be happy here, Mr. Emmett, for in Colonel Buckner I have indeed found a father, while all here are so good, so kind to me; but, may I ask if you have made any discovery regarding the fate of my cousin, Lieutenant Gibbs?"

"Yes, Dashing Charlie, that is what I wish to learn," the colonel said.

"I can give you no tidings of him, Colonel Buckner, more than to tell you just what we discovered up to the time of losing his tracks at the stream which the outlaw chief crossed."

"Tell us all that you did discover, Emmett."

This Dashing Charlie did, adding:

"After we crossed the stream, for Kit Kirby accompanied me, we continued on for miles up into Robbers' Range, following the trail of the outlaws' horses all the while."

"There was also another trail in which I was interested, for I had followed the man whomade it from Valley Camps."

"Indeed! that was a splendid piece of trailing, Emmett; but who was he?"

"Well, sir, I can only tell you that he is known as my Double."

"Your Double?" asked the colonel, with surprise.

"Yes, sir; for he is so like me that he fooled every one in Valley Camps, played cards even with those who know me well, got his horse shod at my expense, and bought a bill of goods at the store, having them charged to me."

"This is remarkable; but I recall now that Lieutenant Gibbs told me that he had gotten you out of trouble into which a counterpart of you had gotten you."

"He kept me from being hanged, sir, and Captain Markham with me, for no one believed, excepting a few, that I had a Double."

"Yes, my father told me of the danger you were both in, and of Lieutenant Gibbs coming just in time; but I do not think, Mr. Emmett, that you are a man easy to imitate."

"That is what makes it more remarkable, Beatrice, to know that the scout has a Double; but it was this man you trailed from Valley Camps?"

"Yes, sir, and he very nearly escaped me wholly by a very clever ruse of changing horses with an ally," and Dashing Charlie related the overtaking of the man Buckskin Bill, and the discovery that he had made that he was the ally of his unknown Double.

The colonel and Beatrice listened with deepest interest to the story, and of the killing of Buckskin Bill by his horse Comanche, and finding the trail of the counterfeiter again while he was looking for Lieutenant Gibbs.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, what do you make out of all this?" the colonel asked.

"I can speak before Miss Markham, I presume, sir?"

"Oh yes, for she must learn to keep secrets of State," said the colonel, with a smile.

"Well, Colonel Buckner, the man whom I am trailing is the one whom you sent me to Valley Camps to find, the one who has been flooding the mines and posts with counterfeit money; and the strangest thing about it is that he is my Double, while his going into the outlaws' country would imply that he is a member of the band of the notorious Muello, the Mexican."

"I should infer as much; but if so, it will be impossible to capture him and stop this flooding the border with this counterfeit money."

"No, Colonel Buckner, I think not."

"Then you have a plan to suggest?"

"I am going to return to Valley Camps, sir, but on the way shall make an effort to track my Double, the counterfeiter, and to discover what strange fate has befallen poor Lieutenant Gibbs."

"Anxious as I am to have you do both, Emmett, I do not desire you to take too big chances yourself, as I fear you intend doing."

"No more than are necessary, sir; but I am going to ask you for the loan of the Pawnee Scout."

"Chief Red Soldier?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can have him, certainly, and I know of no better man to aid you, if you can keep him sober."

"I will try and do so, sir, if I can keep him from carrying a cargo of whisky with him from the fort; but if you will order him on a scout to-morrow, to follow the trail of Lieutenant Gibbs, and tell him to await me at the pass to Robbers' Range, I think he will start out all right."

"I will do so; but when will you leave?"

"To-morrow night, sir; but may I ask, Colonel Buckner, why the scouts did not report the presence of red-skins near the fort?"

"Well, the scouts were nearly all away to the north."

"Dick Darling was here, sir."

"Yes, but he is the private scout of Mr. Grayson Gurney, a gentleman who dwells here from love of a frontier life."

"Dick Darling should have reported to you, sir, that there were Indian signs about, for he passed through the mountains, Kit Kirby told me, the very day that the Indians were moving upon the fort, and I shall give my men a hauling over, sir, and more, tell them to keep an eye upon Mr. Grayson Gurney's private scout, for I have no confidence in him."

"I am sorry to hear this, Emmett; but I, too, shall be more particular with all."

After some further conversation with the colonel and Beatrice, Dashing Charlie took his leave, and he was very glad to get a chance to enjoy a good night's rest and allow Comanche to have the same, for both needed it after all they had gone through in the past few days.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHIEF RED SOLDIER.

ALONG the trail leading to Robbers' Range, as the mountains where Muello held sway were called, an Indian was slowly walking.

His step was not the springy movement of his race, for he at times staggered, as though weak and wounded.

Again he would pause, like one in suffering, gaze around him in a dazed way, and once more resume his uneven walk.

He was an Indian of large size, straight as a soldier, and wore a combination dress that was very peculiar.

His coat was made from a red blanket, trimmed with gold lace and brass buttons, his leggings were of buckskin, fringed and beaded, and he wore top-boots.

An elaborately embroidered blue shirt and a soldier's cap with a pair of crossed sabers upon the front, crossed cannon upon one side and muskets upon the other, completed his costume.

The tail of a fox was attached to the rear of his military cap, and a bunch of eagle feathers stuck up in front.

He was armed with a cavalry carbine, a pair of revolvers, a bowie-knife, and in addition carried a bow and arrows, while swung at his back was a blanket-roll, to which was strapped a small frying-pan, tin cup, and provision-bag.

The Indian was a character at Fort Blank, and was known as Red Soldier.

He was a Pawnee, whose life had been saved by Colonel Buckner, and from that day he had left his tribe and clung to that officer.

A better scout was not known, nor a braver man.

But the Pawnee had one failing—he would go on sprees.

He had learned two things from the whites: One was what he called being a "good Christian," and the other was to drink.

Red Soldier would sometimes go months without touching liquor; but then the craving for it would get the best of him, and he would carry a high hand until the colonel had him put in the lock-up to get sober.

When sobering up he would deliver temperance lectures, smash bottles, and pray to the Great Spirit to make him a "good Injun."

When drunk the devil was his patron saint.

As Red Soldier, as he was proud to be known, now went along the trail it was evident that he was either wounded severely, sick or drunk.

Which was the case the reader will soon discover.

He had been told by Colonel Buckner to go to Robbers' Range, to a certain rendezvous, and there meet Dashing Charlie.

He had promptly obeyed, but had just reached the range when he came across a fresh trail.

It was the trail of a single horse, and one hoof was without a shoe.

Taking the trail he had soon come within hearing of the sound of a hammer striking with a ringing sound.

Red Soldier was on the *qui vive* at once, and he at once began to creep toward the sound.

He soon came to a point where he had a view of the one who was using the hammer.

It was a man dressed in black, and riding a black horse.

When Red Soldier glanced at him the man was engaged in fitting a shoe to the shoeless hoof of his horse, and he had gone down into a canyon to try and prevent the sound of hammering from being heard by any one who might chance to be near.

"Bad pale-face."

"Dressed in black, make him Black Bravo."

"Red Soldier will kill him."

With this the Pawnee fitted an arrow to his bow, crept to within easy range and sent a shot at the Black Bravo.

It was well-aimed, and piercing the outlaw's throat he staggered back and fell a dying man.

Red Soldier gave a suppressed war-whoop and was soon bending over his victim, scalping-knife in hand.

Another moment and the scalp hung at his

belt, and then the red-skin stood like one struck dumb.

There lay the man just dead, and there stood his horse hitched to a tree where he had made him fast while putting on the shoe.

Upon the ground was the saddle and traps, a fire had been lighted to cook the noonday meal, and that which riveted the gaze of the Indian was a small jug.

"It rum!" gasped Red Soldier.

"It rum! try some, only little bit, for Injun feelsick."

He took the cork from the jug and applied it to his nose.

"Yes, rum! good rum. Heap good!"

Then he took a swallow and that led to many more, the liquor gurgling down his capacious throat with a sound like a rivulet flowing over pebbles.

"Ah! so good! make Red Soldier feel better."

So saying he placed the jug upon the ground and began to finish the task of shoeing the horse.

There was but one nail to drive, and Red Soldier had had some experience in the blacksmith-shop at the fort, and he finished the work well.

"Red soldier thirsty, so take one heap little drink rum once more."

So he said, and so he intended; but the liquor gurgled so musically and tasted so delicious that Red Soldier let it flow until he was full.

In fact he was so full that he forgot all about the dead man, his horse and all else except the jug, for this he took with him as he started off, with the remark:

"Must go on trail now, meet Dashing Charlie."

And on the trail he started.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RED-SKIN'S FOE.

WHEN discovered by the reader, Red Soldier, the Pawnee chief, is on the trail.

His instinct alone is keeping him moving.

The trees are having a grand ball before his eyes, the ground is flying up every now and then and hitting him in the face, there are a dozen trails for him to follow, and his legs are getting twisted and tied up as fast as he can unravel them.

But he clings to the "Little Brown Jug."

He would not part with that for his life.

It is his mainstay now, and he is constantly taking a sip of it as he staggers along, his instinct alone keeping him on the trail.

At last he comes to a halt, steadying himself against a tree, while he soliloquizes as follows:

"Injun drunk, Injun happy; Injun on war-path, Injun glad; Injun dead, Injun good."

"Missionary pale-face heap good, too; bring prayer talk and fire-water for poor red-skin."

"Take Injun's land, and rob poor red-skin."

"Pale-face heap bad, Injun much good."

"Poor Red Soldier very sick; want medicine; fire-water good medicine."

With this, Red Soldier drank deep into the jug.

"Feel better now; take more good medicine."

And he was raising the jug again, when his eyes fell upon a dark form confronting him.

He tried to brace up from the tree, but was incapable of it.

Yet the form was advancing, and unable to fight, he was willing to be friendly, so he said:

"How! good pale-face outlaw, Red Soldier his friend."

"Have rum with poor Injun; heap good rum make drunk come."

But the form in black which the drunken eyes of the Indian had taken for Muello's band of Black Bravos, was not a human being but a large mountain bear.

He had seen the Indian, and with a low growl had stopped to give battle.

He was advancing now upon his hind-legs and ready for the prey, for though he did not wish any rum, he was willing to be sociable and eat red-skin meat pickled in rum.

It was just the meal that Bruin had an appetite for, and it was about the time of day he relished a lunch.

Until the bear got within a few steps of him Red Soldier did not realize the mistake he had made.

As the supposed Black Bravo had not shot him, or run upon him, the Indian thought he meant to be friendly, and he was holding out the jug to him to take a drink.

The idea flashed through his drunken mind that he would play an act of treachery, kill the outlaw and get another jug, for he supposed they must all go around with fire-water.

But a savage roar from the supposed human foe, with a fierce growl and quick movement forward, told the Pawnee who he had to deal with.

In spite of his sudden fright he laid the jug carefully down "for future reference."

Then he braced himself for a combat which he knew was to be to the death.

His fears had probably cleared his mind of the cobwebs of his intoxication, and nerved his sinews to meet the conflict.

Barely had he time to draw his long-bladed

bowie-knife in his right hand, a revolver in the left, when the huge monster was upon him.

There were three quick shots, the bullets tearing into the bear's body, a savage howl of rage and pain, a blow that was a bone-breaker dealt on the Indian's side, and then it was a clutch for the death-struggle.

Once, twice, thrice, the long blade went to the hilt in the shaggy body, but there was a tearing of human flesh with sharp claws, a crushing of bones and tremendous blows.

Again and again sunk the knife and again and again were these scratches, bites and blows returned, while the bear would roar savagely and the wild war-cries of the Pawnee would echo through the timber.

Down upon the ground, rolling over and over went Indian and bear, until for a moment they paused by mutual consent for breath for the last death-struggle.

But in that instant there came a sharp report, and the bear's head dropped back, a quiver ran through his body and with a low growl he was dead.

Then from his horse dropped Dashing Charlie, and running up to the prostrate Indian aided him to rise.

Red Soldier gave a low whoop of triumph, waved his knife and then fell heavily.

He was literally torn almost to pieces.

There were cuts in his legs, a bite in his shoulder, teeth-wounds in both arms, gashes in his side from the sharp claws, while his face was scratched almost beyond recognition.

"My poor Red Soldier!"

"You have indeed had a desperate fight for life, and I only hope it has not been your last battle."

"Red Soldier heap big chief, fight with big bear; but Dashing Charlie Pawnee's friend, he come and save him."

"If you are saved; but come, I must get you to a place where I can care for you."

"Good place yonder in canyon—horse there, and dead outlaw; remember now."

"I am afraid you have! on a spree, Pard Soldier."

"Red Soldier all right."

"Want rum; it's good me 'icine."

"It's bad medicine and you ought never to touch it."

"Come, let me help you into my saddle," and Dashing Charlie had to fairly lift the poor Indian onto the horse.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRAILING ALONE.

THE Indian mumbled the way to the canyon, and Dashing Charlie set off, holding him on his horse, for he was very weak from loss of blood.

"Don't leave good medicine; rum good for sick Injun," said Red Soldier, and feeling that he would need it, Dashing Charlie took the jug along.

The canyon was soon reached, and the scout at once set to work to look to the Indian's wounds.

Much experience had made him a good surgeon, added to his life among the red-skins having taught him the virtue in certain herbs for healing.

A needle and thread were taken from his case and the gashes drawn together, after which the wounds were washed and tied up with herbs upon them.

Then a bed was made of the dead outlaw's and Indian's blankets, a shelter of boughs being made over the bed, and Red Soldier was allowed to go to sleep, which he did at once.

Dashing Charlie's next move was to go up the mountain and skin the bear, for he wished the robe to present to Colonel Buckner as a splendid specimen, and also as a souvenir of Red Soldier's desperate fight for life with the savage monster.

The skin was taken to the canyon and staked out, and Dashing Charlie made his arrangements to go in camp there for some days, as he knew that the Indian could not be moved in less time, while the chances were that he would not survive his injuries, for his collar-bone and three ribs had been broken in addition to his other hurts.

But the bones had been skillfully set and bandaged, and the scout hoped for the best results.

The dead outlaw was then searched, and Dashing Charlie, after a moment's hesitation, stripped him of his clothing with the terse remark:

"These may come in useful some day."

Wrapping the body in a blanket, he dug a grave near by and buried him decently, after which he made a shelter for himself, as it was threatening rain.

"I only hope it will rain, and destroy all tracks leading here, for then there will be no danger of discovery," he said.

His next move was to go on a hunt for game, and almost in sight of camp he succeeded in bringing down a fine deer and a wild turkey.

The storm growing more threatening the scout made the shelters secure against a ducking, staked the horses out, gathered wood, and,

as night came on, cooked supper and awaited its coming.

The rain soon after fell in torrents, the little creek went surging by, and the horses crouched close under the trees for shelter.

But the wicky-up built by the scout was dry and substantial, and Red Soldier said, contentedly:

"Injun no get wet, heap good tepee; Dashing Charlie mighty good man—Red Soldier's pale-face brother."

Thus the night passed away, and Dashing Charlie again dressed the Indian's wounds, who did not utter a moan at the pain he suffered, though he did ask for a drink of whisky.

Dashing Charlie gave him a small drink, and followed it with some hot coffee and breakfast, and Red Soldier ate heartily.

"I think you are going to pull through all right, chief," said the scout.

"Me no die this time—Injun heap tough."

"You are, indeed, Red Soldier, for few white men could stand the racket you did—two such desperate fights."

"One fight."

"No, two."

"Where two fights?"

"The battle with the Little Brown Jug, and afterwards with the bear."

"Ugh!"

And the red-skin seemed to appreciate that he was worsted, for he said:

"Chief sleep now."

The storm had cleared away, but the rain had destroyed every trace of a trail to the canyon, and as there was no reason for one's going there, it was not to be expected that the little camp would be found out.

There was plenty of juicy grass there for the horses, a brook close at hand, and the game would last for several days, while, by building a fire only at night among the rocks where it could not be seen, no danger would be incurred, for a smoke in the daytime could be seen a long way off, and the situation was in the Robbers' Range.

Thus several days passed away and Red Soldier slowly, but surely improved.

Though anxious to go upon the trail Dashing Charlie would not desert his Indian ally; but he took occasion to read him a temperance lecture, telling him how much he had missed by drinking the rum and not joining him sober, while it had nearly cost him his life besides much suffering and a long time to be laid up.

Red Soldier "swore off" again and again, and at last said he was able to ride the outlaw's horse to the fort and let Dashing Charlie go on his way, while he was very sorry he could not help him.

So he was placed upon the horse of the dead outlaw, the bear robe behind him, and the jug emptied of its rum, was filled with water and tied to the horn of the saddle for him.

"Tell the colonel that I have gone alone on the trail, and that when I come back it will be with news for him," said Dashing Charlie as he bade Red Soldier good-by and watched him ride away on his trip of thirty miles to the fort.

When he disappeared from sight, Dashing Charlie mounted Comanche and started on his lone trail into the Robbers' Range.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"HANDS UP, PARD!"

ALONG the trail leading through the Robbers' Range, a horseman was slowly riding one afternoon.

He was well mounted, and an equally good horse as the one he bestrode was in lead, carrying what appeared to be a very heavy pack.

The horseman was whistling, as he rode along, a popular ballad, but not loud enough to be heard at a very great distance.

"If I get through all right, I'll be in great luck, but if not, I have but one game to play," he muttered, dropping his whistling as thoughts crowded upon him.

The trail led just there among some high rocks, and as he reached them, suddenly rung out the startling command:

"Halt! Hands up, pard!"

The horseman obeyed both orders, for he came quickly to a halt, and at the same time raised his hands above his head.

Then from out of their rocky hiding-place came three men, their rifles covering the stranger.

They were dressed in black and were without doubt men of the Black Bravo band.

"Watch him, pards, for he surrenders so easy-like it do look like a little sly business," said one.

"We has him doad to rights if he winks," was the response.

"See here, Dashing Charlie, you is as meek as a lamb, and we never thought ter rake you in without a fight tooth and nail," said the leader of the party, and two more men came in sight now.

"Why do you call me Dashing Charlie?" asked the horseman.

"For you is that pilgrim."

"You are mistaken."

"I am not."

"Come, yer can't come no sich game on us, for we knows yer."

"I am not Dashing Charlie, and I came here to see your chief."

"You'll see him sooner than you wishes to, I guess."

"Where is he?"

"He'll be along soon, for we was waitin' for him when we seen you coming."

"All right. I'll wait for him."

"I guesses yer will, seeing as it would be on healthy trying to light out."

"And you says yer hain't Dashing Charlie?"

"I am not the scout by that name."

"Who is yer, then?"

"Oh, an adventurer who came here to see your chief."

"Yes, and Dashing Charlie has wanted to see him, too, and now he'll get the chance."

"There comes the chief, pards," cried a voice.

And just then Muello came in sight up the trail, followed by a dozen of his men and with a score of pack-horses bringing up the rear.

It was the whole outfit of the Black Bravos, and they were on the march.

The chief rode up to the spot and halted, his face hidden by the mask he wore, but his eyes peering straight into those of the prisoner.

"Well, cap'n, we has got Dashing Charlie for you," said the leader of the party who had captured the prisoner.

"So I see; and right glad am I, Dashing Charlie, to welcome you into the land of the Mountain Marauders, for I am Muello, the Mexican."

"I am glad to meet you, for I came here for that purpose; but I am not Dashing Charlie."

"Not Dashing Charlie Emmett, the Scout?"

"I am not."

"He war trying to give us ther same racket, captain."

"Who are you, then?"

"Have you ever heard of Dashing Charlie's Double?"

"I have."

"I am Dashing Charlie's Double."

"Do you mean it?"

"I can give you proof, if you will allow me to see you alone."

"Why, alone?"

"I have my reasons."

"Don't trust him, cap'n, for he means dirt," said one of the outlaws.

"Yes, you may see me alone."

"Hand your weapons to that man, dismount and follow me."

The stranger obeyed in silence, and the chief led the way out of hearing of the others.

"Now, Dashing Charlie, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I am not Dashing Charlie, as I told you."

"I shall believe that you are until you give me proof that you are not."

"I said that I was his Double."

"Yes; but your proof."

"You have heard that Dashing Charlie's Double has several times passed counterfeit bills in the camps, or have you not heard so?"

"I have."

"You being an outlaw chief, I do not hesitate to tell you a secret."

"Well?"

"I am the counterfeiter."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Where is your proof?"

"Here; and much more in my pack-saddle."

And he handed over a package of new bills looking as though they were just from the press.

"I begin to believe you now; but, why have you come here?"

"Let me tell you why."

"I came West to get good money for bad, as I thought the risks were less, and I could dodge the detectives better."

"I am an engraver by trade, and a good one, and I worked in the Government employ in Washington, the while cutting my dies from the real ones."

"I was a long time at it, but at last had plates running from ten dollars up to five hundred, that is, tens, twenties, fifties, one hundreds and five hundreds."

"I also managed to make a very fair counterfeit of the paper used, but, before I could pass much of the 'queer' the detectives were on my track."

"I sought another place for work, and again had to fly."

"But I was found out again, and so hid my plates, and it was surrender or death."

"I chose the former, was sent to prison, made my escape after a year at hard labor, got the plates I had so securely hidden, and came West."

"I was born West and until I was twenty was a scout, so I am a plainsman."

"I got out some of my 'queer,' took in a partner, and began to work the soldiers."

"Then I discovered that I was suspected, so I lit out and came here, bringing my partner with me."

"I then found out that I resembled Dashing

Charlie, the Scout, and that helped me a great deal, for I got rid of my bad money in his name."

"Finding that he was put on my trail, from news sent from the fort, I concluded to hunt you up for protection, and, as I have my plates, press, ink, and paper with me, we can make money and get rid of it at different points, while under your protection I will not have to skip about as I do, and will be safe."

"Now, you know why I am here?"

"I do, and you are welcome, for if I cannot get hold of a fortune in gold I am in search of, we can get rid of a fortune in bad money for good."

"Come, and I'll tell the men that you are one of us, and you can make them a present all round of a hundred each of your bank-notes."

"I'll do it," was the only reply of the counterfeiter.

CHAPTER XL.

RED SOLDIER ARRIVES AT THE FORT.

THE sentinel on the lookout at the fort only reported the coming of a horseman.

Colonel Buckner and a party of officers and ladies happened to be at the stockade gate as the horsemen approached, for they had been watching a race among the men, and as the stranger rode up there was a general chorus of

"Ahl!"

"It is Red Soldier the Pawnee chief!" cried the adjutant.

"What is left of him," the colonel added *sotto voce*.

It was really what was left of the Pawnee.

Both arms were in a sling, and his face was scratched as though he had been in collision with a buzz-saw.

His clothes were in tatters, and his body and limbs were bound up securely.

He certainly looked as though he had been used by a cyclone to mop up the prairie.

"The Red Soldier, big Pawnee chief," he said by way of introduction, knowing that he would hardly be recognized.

"Why, chief, what has happened to you?" asked the colonel trying his best to look serious and sympathetic, for he felt that the red-skin was suffering greatly in spite of his comical appearance.

"Ma meet big bear," was the quiet response.

"I should think so; but where is the bear?"

"Bear all right—see!"

He motioned to the bearskin rolled up behind him.

"Poor fellow, you have had a terrible fight of it and must go into the hospital at once."

"Pawnee all right now; Dashing Charlie fix him up good."

"Ahl and where is the scout?"

"Charlie say tell big chief he go 'lone on the trail."

"Has he found out anything regarding Lieutenant Gibbs?"

And all listened now for a response.

"Charlie say the young soldier chief don't think dead; but he find out all right."

A murmur of approbation greeted this response, and Red Soldier continued:

"Chief much 'shamed for bad Injun, heap bad."

"Meet bad white man—here his horse—kill him, and find this bad medicine."

As he was repentant now, rum was "bad medicine" to the Pawnee.

"Me drink heap too much, forget all about bad white man, go on trail, see bear, think he outlaw, and ask him have some rum."

"No outlaw, but bear, and have devil big fight all over—see?"

All shouted with laughter at Red Soldier's comical illustration of his fight by referring to himself.

But Red Soldier took the merriment as delight at his killing the bear, and he smiled, too.

Then he went on to say:

"Me 'most gone, and bear 'most gone, but Injun die first, sure, when Charlie, good Charlie, come and kill bear, save Injun!"

"Bravo, Dashing Charlie!" cried the colonel.

And the absent scout got a cheer in his honor.

"Me very bad, but Charlie take me to camp, and he medicine-man all right—see?"

All saw that the Indian had been pretty well distressed and plastered—it was very evident even to the adjutant's very near-sighted wife.

"Seeing is believing, chief, and I am sure that Dashing Charlie proved a Good Samaritan to you; but you must be placed in the hands of the surgeon, for now you resemble a target after cannon-practice," said the colonel.

"It's lucky no shot struck the bull's-eye dead center," added Beatrice, in a low tone.

But the remark was heard and applauded, while the colonel said:

"Yes, no vital spot was hit fortunately; but, Red Soldier, what reason had Dashing Charlie for believing that Lieutenant Gibbs was not dead?"

"Don't know, big chief he go on trail alone, Injun get drunk, bear chew him up and he no good."

That was so evident to all observers that the colonel called a sergeant and sent Red Soldier

at once to the hospital, where his coming created considerable comment, once he was seen.

The coming back of the red-skin scout caused the fate of Lieutenant Gibbs to be talked over again.

In truth the loss of the gallant officer was too recent for him to be forgotten, and had cast a shadow over all the fort.

Especially did Colonel Buckner feel his loss; but neither did he or Beatrice believe him to be dead.

The fair Texan asserted again and again that he would turn up all right and her hope buoyed others up to the same belief.

By a visit to the Pawnee chief in the hospital, after the whole medical force at the fort had had a chance at him, Colonel Buckner got an idea of just what had occurred, and that when Dashing Charlie had come up so opportunely to save the Indian's life, he was going to the rendezvous appointed with him, having made some valuable discovery regarding Lieutenant Gibbs.

Red Soldier bewailed his getting drunk, thus losing him the chance of going on the trail with the noted scout, but showed the outlaw's scalp with considerable pride and mentioned the fact that he had captured his horse as well.

Several scouting parties of cavalry, under efficient officers, and led by good scouts, had gone out for a couple of days' run around the fort, hoping to find some clue to the young aide-de-camp, but they had come in with the same report, that they had made no discovery whatever.

But now the arrival of Red Soldier, the Pawnee chief, was a ray of hope to all that Frederic Gibbs was not dead, though what had happened to him no one could guess.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. GRAYSON GURNEY.

THERE is one person, who has been several times referred to in this story, whom it would now be well enough to make the reader acquainted with.

This personage is the one referred to as Grayson Gurney, a gentleman, who, from love of adventure and wild border life, had come to the frontier to live.

Mr. Gurney was a man of decidedly striking appearance.

Six feet in height, he was the possessor of a pair of broad shoulders that were the envy of many an army officer.

His form was simply perfect, and his hands and feet were as small and shapely as a woman's.

He dressed well, for his hunting-suits were of the best and fitted him perfectly, while when in the fort he wore the finest of clothing and was as neat as a dandy.

With a handsome face, he yet possessed one that was strongly marked with indomitable will power.

He had brought letters to the fort to several officers, from friends of theirs in the East, and was said to be a very wealthy man.

Without seeming to seek ladies' society, he was yet ever courteous in manner to all whom he met.

He had hired a scout and hunter for his especial use, and had brought with him a perfect arsenal in the way of small-arms, while his horses were the best in the fort.

He had paid liberally to have a most comfortable cabin built for himself, and a stable for his horses, with a hut near for Dick Darling, his guide, and a couple of wagons coming with an army supply-train had made him most comfortable in his isolated quarters, for he had pitched his camp upon the river-bank, a quarter of a mile from the fort.

He had paid hangers-on about the fort to build him a fence around a garden-plot, and plant vegetables, while he kept his own table liberally supplied with game and provisions from the fort store.

Among the supplies which the wagons had brought to him were cases of fine wines and liquors, and he knew how to entertain most royally.

Though not popular at the fort, for he was a hard man to get acquainted with, he was yet always welcome in the officers' families as well as at the Bachelors' Club, where he was often a winner for very large sums of money in the fascinating game of poker.

Going and coming at will, with a negro servant to care for his horse, and a guide to lead him to the best hunting-grounds, rich, a fine talker, a man who had traveled extensively, the "Sport" as he was called did just to suit himself.

Sometimes he would be gone on a hunt for a couple of weeks, and he was always most generous with his game when he returned, and the quantities he brought proved him a fine huntsman.

Neither Indians or outlaws did he seem to have any dread of, and many were the prophecies that he would yet be killed through his recklessness.

Certified drafts came to him from the East

regularly, always for large amounts, and these the paymaster would always cash for him, as they were as good as gold.

In his cabin he lived in almost luxury, though it was said no one would put up with, or could stand greater hardships, when in the field.

He had his books about him, and they showed a refined nature and scholarly mind.

He played the guitar and cornet well, possessed a rich baritone voice, and could certainly make himself a most agreeable companion to man or woman when it pleased him to do so.

Some days had Beatrice Markham been at the fort before she met Mr. Grayson Gurney.

She had heard much of him from officers and their families, and several of the young ladies had told her that he was a splendid "catch."

Seated with her adopted father one night in their quarters, a week after her arrival, the orderly had announced:

"Mr. Gurney."

"Ah, Gurney, I am glad to see you back again, for we have had an exciting time since you left, and I half-way feared that your chips had been called in, as the scouts say out here."

"But permit me to present you to my adopted daughter, Miss Beatrice Markham Buckner, who, you remember, I sent to Texas to have come to me."

Grayson Gurney was faultlessly dressed, his toilet appearing more studied than usual, and he certainly looked to be a very handsome man just nearing thirty-five.

He bowed low to Beatrice, and then crossing to her, extended his hand, while he said, in his courtly way:

"I am very glad to see Miss Buckner at the fort, and wish for her every happiness in her new life, while I congratulate Colonel Buckner upon having found such a daughter."

Colonel Buckner thought it a very pretty little speech, but Beatrice did not appear impressed with it, and only replied:

"I thank you, Mr. Gurney."

As it was tea-time the colonel asked Mr. Gurney in with them, and, accepting the invitation he made himself most agreeable.

He talked well, regretted his absence during the Indian fight, as he would have been glad to have been an actor therein, said that he had had immense success in hunting, and had ordered sent to the colonel's kitchen a lot of game he had brought back with him.

Then he seemed to feel deeply the loss of Lieutenant Gibbs, and said that he would go with his guide to see if they could find some trace of the missing officer.

When at last he took his leave, hardly had the door closed behind him when Beatrice said, very decidedly:

"Papa Buckner, I do not like that man."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LOST TREASURE.

IT became very evident to the officers that Grayson Gurney had at last received a dead-center shot in the heart before he had seen Beatrice a second time.

He seemed perfectly infatuated with her, and drank a toast to "her beauty" when he gave a dinner-party at his quarters the day following his return.

He had come back well supplied with game, and had, with his usual generosity, sent presents around to all the married officers of the results of his sport.

The name of the colonel's adopted daughter coming up at the dinner-table, Grayson Gurney had at once spoken of her in the highest terms.

"She is very beautiful in face, and possesses a perfect form, while I am sure hers is a noble nature, if her countenance can be taken as the index of her character," he had said.

Then he had said how great his sympathy for her was, and the conversation turned upon the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Fred Gibbs, when a young officer remarked:

"I was sure that we would all have Gibbs to fight, he having the inside track from being a third cousin, and also having gotten the lead by having been sent to Texas after her; but lo! she speaks of Gibbs only as a cousin, and had he returned with her I do not believe he would have been a dangerous rival."

"You can never tell what a woman thinks of a man, and especially such a woman as the Texas beauty, for she may be over head and ears in love with poor Fred, and crying her eyes out about him in secret, but she is not the one to give it away that such is the case," said another officer.

"Well, gentlemen, the field is open to all comers, as I learn, and so may the best man win my I," remarked Grayson Gurney, and then he drank to the beauty of "the beautiful Texan," a toast that was drunk standing and with right good will by all.

If in love with her it could only be that Gurney loved Beatrice for her own sweet self alone, and not for her money, for he certainly had plenty of his own, or reports were false regarding him.

And so while being discussed, though with respect and kindness, at Grayson Gurney's dinner to a dozen young officers, Beatrice sat with her

adopted father talking upon a subject which had not before been mentioned between them.

"I wish to say to you, my child," the colonel had said in opening the conversation, "that as I do not expect to marry, I intend to make you my heiress."

"Oh, Papa Buckner, do not speak of your being taken away from me, and of money."

"I would rather have a father's love than all the gold in the world, and with the ranch in Texas I certainly will have fortune enough."

"But, then, you have far more than the ranch, my child, which, with its cattle and all its belongings, cannot be worth over sixty thousand dollars."

"Father valued it all at a hundred thousand, I believe, sir."

"Then there is the gold left you by your Uncle Matthew, the Miner."

"But I never got that, Papa Buckner."

"Never got it?"

"No, sir."

"Why, it was intended for you, and of value a quarter of a million."

"True, sir, but when my father was taking it to Texas, Dashing Charlie urged him to hide it on the trail and return for it when not hounded by road-agents, for Muello and his men were after him, you know."

"Yes."

"And so father and the guide buried it somewhere."

"And the guide is where?"

"He was killed."

"And your father—"

"Never made known its hiding-place, though he intended to do so."

"He died suddenly, though you knew that he could not get well?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did your father and the guide alone know where the gold was hidden?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is remarkable, for your father must have left some map, some direction of where the gold was placed."

"He intended to tell me, sir, as I said; but was seized with a fit of coughing one day and passed away, while I never urged him to tell me of it, thinking he would do so in his own way and time."

"And did he leave no papers?"

"Yes, sir, to be given into the keeping of Lieutenant Gibbs for you, when you should come after me."

"Then those papers must tell the story."

"Perhaps so, sir."

"And where are they?"

"Lieutenant Gibbs had them with him, I believe."

"Too bad, for that loses the treasure if we do not find poor Fred, while if he has the papers with him, and has fallen into the hands of the Mountain Marauders, then the gold is surely lost."

"It would seem so, sir."

"I only hope that we will find Fred, for I am deeply attached to him, and he is a fine fellow, but if he is a prisoner to the outlaws, I fear they may secure the papers that will give them this treasure."

"I would rather find Lieutenant Gibbs than the gold," said Beatrice decidedly.

"Well said, my child."

"Your heart is in the right place, I am glad to see."

"But tell me, why is it that you do not appear to like Mr. Gurney?"

"Intuition, I suppose, for I do not know why I should not like him, and he certainly is very kind to me, for only this afternoon he told me he was going on a scout to-morrow to try and find Cousin Fred."

"If he does I am sure I shall like him then, knowing that I have no right to feel as I do toward him."

"Well, Beatrice, I hope Gurney may find Fred, and that he will find your lost fortune for you," was the colonel's response.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HELD UP ON THE TRAIL.

THE stage-coach running to Fort Blank was due only twice a month, and departed but twice on its eastward-bound trip.

Si Slick was the driver, and he was a man who could shoot as well as he could handle the ribbons over four horses.

Then, too, he had a splendid team and made it his boast that he once put them to speed and outran a dozen of the Black Bravos who had been in chase of him.

Si Slick's coach often brought more freight than passengers, and it was very seldom that he was ever "held up" on the trail.

He had twice killed road-agents who had sought to stop him, and they had come to understand that where they brought him to a halt they would have to do so in a place where there was no loophole of escape for him, for he would make a dash to go through, or show fight where he saw the photograph of an opportunity to meet with success.

Si Slick was coming on the home stretch to the fort one afternoon, and was congratulating himself upon having gotten through without a scare,

when he suddenly saw two men ride into the road before him.

Two men were not enough to daunt Si Slick, and he cast an eye behind him.

Then he saw also two men following the coach.

Their dress told him that they were the Black Bravos.

There might be more and there might not.

At any rate Si Slick determined "to make a break," as he expressed it.

So he sung out to his passengers:

"Hold hard, all! don't git skeered at powder-burning, and lay low, for I'm a-goin' ter make a break to go through."

There were three passengers in the coach.

One of them was the post chaplain, returning from a vacation, which he had managed to have extended twice, as he was enjoying himself East, so he had left the people at the fort to pray for each other and the "dead to bury the dead."

At the words of Si Slick he had jumped as though shot at, clasped his hand upon his well-filled wallet, the gift of admiring lady friends, and thrust it into a case marked "Prayer Book and Hymnal," while he murmured a prayer for the safety of his money and the sparing of his life.

A second passenger was an old borderman, and he gave a whoop and drew his revolvers as he heard what Si Slick had said, while he cried:

"Push 'em through, Pard Si, and I'll play my sixes o'ter 'em!"

The third passenger was a woman, and she was veiled, and dressed in mourning.

Her form was slender and graceful though, and a glimpse which the chaplain had caught of her face had made him most anxious to be attentive to her.

She had started at the words of the driver, and then had said earnestly:

"Oh, we must not be robbed, for all I possess in the world I have with me."

"I'll pray for your safety my dear lady," said the chaplain.

"Better fight for it, Pard Sky Pilot, for prayin' don't go with Muello and his men."

"Hain't yer got no weepens?" said the old borderman.

"Only these," and the chaplain held up his prayer-book case.

"No good, fer prayer don't kill."

"Here, take my revolver, and pop 'em out o' thet winder, while I takes 'em through this one."

In the mean time Si Slick had started his horses into a run, and was preparing to drive through at the risk of being shot.

But unfortunately for him the trail narrowed there, and upon each side grew heavy timber.

As he sped on the keen eye of the driver detected ropes drawn across the trail, and made fast to the trees upon either side.

There were half a dozen of them, and they were stake-ropes strong and stout.

He knew that he might break one, but half a dozen, no!

They would throw his leaders, who could not clear them in harness, heap his wheelers on top of them and pile the coach up over all.

"I'm caught for sart'in," cried Si.

And he put his foot on the heavy brake, gathered in his reins, and brought his team to a halt just as they came to the rope barrier.

Then Si saw that the two men ahead did not represent the whole number, and he had been wise in halting.

There were half a dozen more Black Bravos visible in the timber, while behind him there had closed in on the coach eight or ten more.

"Whew! what a picnic I would have had," he muttered, as he halted his team, and, with a broad grin, glanced over the crowd of outlaws dressed in black.

"So yer has me foul, hain't yer, devils?" he said, good-humoredly.

"Yes; and if you ever try to break through my line again, I'll take you from your box and hang you!" said the masked leader, now riding forward.

"Maybe you will, and maybe you won't, pard; but I goes through when I hes ther photograph o' a chance, and don't you forgit it."

"Then try it on, and see if I do not keep my word."

"Now, who have you aboard?"

"No money, I am glad ter say."

"Who are your passengers?"

"A sky-pilot going to ther fort, havin' been on a racket East, so in course he is broke."

"Who else?"

"A border rooster as has got lead and steel, but no gold."

"Who else?"

"A poor lady as is going ter see some dying soldier at ther fort."

"Are those all?"

"Look for yourself, cap'n."

"What freight have you?"

"I jist missed fetching a rich load; but I hain't got nothing o' value."

"I shall see for myself, for I never knew one of you drivers to tell the truth," said Muello, the Mexican.

"And I never knowed one o' you fellers as wouldn't steal, and lie and kill, and do all else mean, and jist ter git a leetle o' other folks' gold

which you is too lazy ter work for," hotly replied Si Slick, unheeding the danger he was in.

But Muello, the Mexican, laughed at his words and repeated:

"I will see for myself," adding, sternly:

"Out of that coach, all of you!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

PIGEONS TO PLUCK.

"ONE of you men throw open that door, and kill the man who shows a weapon."

Such was the order of the outlaw chief as he rode near the door of the coach, while in his hand was a revolver ready for instant use.

Si Slick sat upon the box with feelings hard to describe, for he felt that those under his care were a part and parcel of himself, and really the good fellow would rather have been robbed than that they should be.

"I'll only git even with you eternal thieves when I attends yer hanging some day," he grunted.

"Shut up!" and the chief's revolver was turned up at the driver.

"Oh, I don't scare for a cent, Muello, the Dago, and don't you forgit it."

"Yer hain't a-going ter shoot the goose thet brings yer ther golden egg, for if I git my toes turned up to ther daisies, thet won't be a single man ever draw rein on this trail, and you knows it."

While Si was talking back fearlessly at the chief, the three passengers had gotten out and stood before the bandit.

The chaplain had on his face a look of injured innocence, while he was also much alarmed as to what the result would be.

The woman had submitted quietly, and the old borderman was as mad as a trooper.

"Well, miss or madam, for I cannot tell which you are, it is polite to show attention to the ladies first, so what have you in the way of valuables?" said the chief.

"I have some jewelry of little value as far as its intrinsic worth is concerned, and a pocket-book containing a hundred dollars."

"I wish it, and more; see if you cannot find more."

"I have nothing else, sir."

"Please hand that over."

"Say, yer black-faced villain, take what I has got and let thet lady have thet little she have got," said the borderman, angrily.

"I shall call upon you in good time, sir, and I advise you to be more civil in your address."

Then turning to the woman, he continued:

"Come, give me your money, for you will find they will not let you suffer at the fort."

"I am going among strangers, sir."

"You will make friends, for I have an idea that you are good-looking."

"I wish your money."

She held it forth, and he took it without a word, throwing it into a buckskin bag hanging to his saddle-horn.

"Now your jewelry, please."

"Oh, sir, must I give it up?"

"Yes."

"Will you not let me keep at least this ring?"

She held out her hand and pointed to a ring of unique design upon her wedding-finger.

It was a pair of eagle-claws clasping a ruby, and was of very fine workmanship and considerable value.

The chief glanced at the ring and started visibly.

"Where did you get this ring?" he asked her, in a low voice, as he took it from her hand and examined it.

"It was a gift to me years ago."

"Will you not allow me to keep it?"

"I will not."

And the chief placed it upon his own hand, while he added:

"I fancy the design; but I will give you one I wear, and it will protect you from further robbery, should you cross the path of any of my men."

"Will you wear it?"

"I will, yes, under the circumstances," was the answer.

And the chief drew from his hand a band of gold and said:

"Do not take this off unless you are again halted by my men."

"Then bid them look to see what is within the ring, and you will be respected."

"Now, sir, your wealth I will accept, and I wish no whining about it."

He addressed the chaplain, who replied, in an injured tone:

"Wicked man, you will yet be overtaken in your sinful life, and—"

"Silence! hand me your money, or I'll take your life."

This was a startling demand, and the chaplain hastily handed out a roll of small bills.

"I want what you have hidden away."

"But sir, I—"

But a revolver thrust into the face of the chaplain caused him to quickly hand over another roll of bills.

"Now your watch and chain."

"It was a present to me from a dying—"

"You'll present it to me while dying if you

don't— Ah! thank you; it is a very fine thing, piece, I see."

"But I know how well you gentry of the cloth can hide things, so hand me over your Bible, for I would like to do as you would advise me, namely, search the Scriptures."

"But, sir, I have no Bible with me, and—"

"Well, your prayer-book will do as well—quick!"

The parson groaned, but handed over the case marked "Prayer Book and Hymnal," and in it was found the parson's wallet.

"I thought so."

"Searching the Scriptures panned out well that time for me."

"Thank you, parson, for your contributions."

"Now, sir," and he turned to the plainsman.

"Pard, yer can't git blood outen a turnip, kin yer?"

"No, but you hand over your money or I will have you searched."

"Search me, and yer are welcome ter all yer kin git."

"Search him, men!"

Several seized him and he was quickly searched, but his weapons, a pipe and several dollars were all they found, so they were disappointed in not finding a rich haul, as they had hoped.

"You can go on your way now, Si Slick," said the chief, and mounting their horses the outlaws rode away, leaving the coach to start on its way for the fort.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PLAINSMAN.

THE coach rolled on after being halted by the Black Bravos, and the chaplain was in anything but an enviable humor, while the veiled lady was silent, apparently lost in her own painful meditations.

As for the plainsman, he was chuckling to himself about something, and it caused the chaplain to regard him more closely.

He saw what appeared to be rather a hard-looking customer, with unkempt hair and bushy beard that seemed all tangled together.

He was shabbily dressed, and had a stoop in his shoulders as though he felt the burden of life rather a hard load to carry.

After the coach had gone a mile perhaps from the place where it had been halted, the plainsman said:

"I say, pard, will you jist hand a few lines I will write to ther colonel at ther fort?"

"You will see him there upon our arrival."

"But I hain't goin' thet."

"Where are you going then?"

"I leaves ther old huss about here, say in a few minutes."

"In this wild country?"

"I guesses so."

"You'll be killel by the outlaws."

"Maybe so and maybe no; but I is goin' ter desert all ther same and I wants yer ter hand ther colonel a leetle billydux from me."

"I will do it if you desire."

"That's what I does, and I wants ter say ter you, mi-s, not ter be too cast down-like, for maybe yer'll git back yer jewelry, leastwise I hopes so."

"Oh, sir, if I only thought so."

"Waal, it be a long lane that don't have a tarn in it, and that Mexican Dago chief hev been traveling a mighty long distance without finding the train."

"But I leaves yer here— Say, pard, jist stop yer old huss a minute while I gits out."

Si Slick drew rein and taking a pencil and paper from his pocket the plainsman wrote a few lines hastily and handing it to the parson said:

"Now don't forgit, pard, but give ther colonel this ter read, soon as yer gits inter ther fort."

"I will do so, my man."

"Thankee, and good-by to yer both—so-long, Si, for I is off."

"Yer is off" ter leave ther coach here in this kentry.

"Don't be a durned fool," growled Si.

"Now I hain't sich a fool as I looks—ta-ta, old man," and the plainsman walked off in the timber and disappeared.

"Waal, ther loss o' his old pipe and two dollars hev turned his mind," said Si, while the woman asked:

"Oh, sir, do you think it right that we should allow him to go?"

"I have an idea that there is method in his madness, mi-s, for he has written a note to the colonel, you know."

"True, and it would be right to see what it is, for really he should not be allowed to go off by himself if he is demented in reality."

The chaplain took the note from his pocket and glanced at it.

It was addressed to:

"COLONEL GABR EL BUCKNER,

"COMMANDING FORT BLANK.

"Through the kindness of Post Chaplain Walter McMurdo."

"What! he knows my name?" the chaplain said in amazement.

"This is strange, sir."

"Yes, and I will glance at the note—ah! it is in the Sioux language as I live!" cried Chaplain McMurdo, now thoroughly astonished.

So he called to Si Slick and told him of his discovery, and the driver said:

"Waal, he may be one o' them border detective fellers who is putting up a job on the outlaws, for he don't look like nobody's fool as has got away, do he?"

"No, I believe with you that he is different from what he appears to be."

So once more the coach went on its way and when a short while after Si Slick glanced behind him he saw the plainsman in the trail and going back toward where they had left the outlaws.

It was late in the afternoon when the coach rolled into Fort Blank, and as was the custom, it was greeted with a cheer by the soldiers and others gathered there to receive it.

Si quickly reported the robbery of his passengers by the Mountain Marauders, and the desertion back on the trail by the plainsman.

The chaplain was welcomed back by his friends, into whose sympathetic ears he poured his tale of woe at his being robbed.

As for the veiled stranger, she asked Si if she could not find some quiet place to remain, as she had come to the fort upon a mission about which she wished to see Colonel Buckner.

The storekeeper had a place for her, Si told her, and he escorted her there where she was well received by the wife of the trader and shown into what was a really very pleasant room.

The chaplain, meanwhile, had gone to report his arrival, and also to hand into the hands of the colonel the note intrusted to his care by the plainsman.

"Welcome back, Chaplain McMurdo; but I regret to learn, as I just have, that your coach was held up and robbed on the way here," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, we were all robbed, and one of the passengers, a lady, I deeply sympathize with," and the chaplain explained the situation as he knew it.

"I am sorry to hear this, and my daughter and myself will call upon her at once— Ah! a note for me, you say," and Colonel Buckner took the plainsman's note.

"It is written in the Sioux tongue, too, but fortunately I understand it— Ah! from Dashing Charlie, too, and he says he has certain knowledge that Lieutenant Gibbs is alive, and that he will take the outlaws' trail at once, having taken passage in the coach to do so—but you must not speak of this, chaplain."

"No, sir, of course not; but that man then was Dashing Charlie in disguise?"

"So it would seem, sir," was the answer.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SI SLICK'S LADY PASSENGER.

CHAPLAIN WALTER MCMURDO knew Dashing Charlie well, as the chief of scouts at Fort Blank for a long while.

But in the supposed old plainsman who was his fellow-passenger, he could find no trace of resemblance to the handsome scout.

He had been annoyed at the supposed plainsman's watching his every attention to this veiled fellow-traveler, and he had heard very plain words from him when he was told to substitute gunpowder and lead for prayer.

But Chaplain McMurdo was a sensible man, after all, and knew full well how the position he held was regarded by many in the army, and so went on doing his duty as he saw it.

The coming of the veiled lady, as she had, caused something of a stir in the fort, and all were indignant that she should have been robbed, when Si Slick and the chaplain made the circumstances known.

The colonel and Beatrice at once called upon her, and as she came into the storekeeper's little sitting-room to greet them, they were both surprised at her appearance.

She was a beautiful woman certainly, scarcely over twenty-five, and with an abundance of red gold hair clustering about her head, presenting a striking contrast to her large, dreamy black eyes, so full of sadness that they at once drew one toward her with sympathy, a feeling that she had known what it was to suffer.

She was plainly but neatly dressed, and the only ornament she wore was the peculiar ring upon her wedding-finger given her by the outlaw chief.

It was a wide band of gold, with two smaller bands of silver each side of a red enamel ring in the center.

"Colonel Buckner, allow me to introduce myself to you as Miss Creola Gray, and I intended calling on you, sir, on a matter of business which brought me to the fort."

"Miss Buckner, it was kind of you to come and see me, and I appreciate it."

"Be seated, please."

Her manner was refined and easy, her voice very low and musical.

They both shook hands with her, and the colonel said:

"I am anxious to serve you in any way in my power, Miss Gray, and regret exceedingly that

you were robbed on your way here, but trust it will not inconvenience you greatly."

Her face flushed at this, but she said, after a moment of hesitation:

"Colonel Buckner, in a word I will tell you my story, sir, if you will be kind enough to permit me."

"Most assuredly, Miss Gray."

"I am an orphan, and a brother and myself inherited a large fortune from our parents."

"But my brother was wild and wayward, and not only squandered his means, but all that I had left me, so that I accepted a position as governess in a private family in New York and went abroad with them for several years."

"Returning to this country, a letter from my brother told me that he had enlisted as a private in the United States Army, and was ill and wretched at a frontier fort."

"The letter had been written months before, and, as my charges are grown and my duties as governess ended, I decided to come West and see him."

"Nearly all of my money saved I had with me when I was robbed, and my jewelry was also taken, so I may say I am almost destitute, for I have enough to get back to New York where I can obtain work; but I first wish to find my brother—if he is living!"

And her voice faltered as she spoke the last words.

"Do you know the regiment your brother was a soldier in, Miss Gray?"

"Yes, sir, it was the —th Cavalry."

"There are four companies of that regiment here under my command."

"It was here that he was when I heard from him, sir, and he belonged to B Company."

"Indeed! Captain Dunn's Troop."

"And now his name, Miss Gray?"

"His name was Donald Gray, sir, but we called him Don."

"There is no such name on the roll of B Troop as I happen to know, Miss Gray, but there was a young man in the company who enlisted by the name of Graydon Donaldson, and this seems to include the name reversed of Donald Gray."

"I am sure that he must be my brother, sir."

"Miss Gray," and the colonel's voice was low and sympathetic now, "I am pained to have to tell you that your brother no longer answers to roll-call on earth."

"Dead!" she gasped.

"Yes, he died three months ago."

"I will leave Beatrice with you now, and soon return bringing you the full particulars you seek of your brother."

The colonel left the room, feeling that it was best to have Beatrice comfort the sorrowing girl, and went to his office, where he summoned his post-adjutant.

"Captain Mayhew, please give me full particulars, written, of Corporal Graydon Donaldson of B Troop, —th Cavalry, who was killed some three months ago."

"At the time of his death he had some moneys due him, and he left some papers and things, all of which have brought here to my office."

It did not take the adjutant long to place in the hands of Colonel Buckner the data asked for regarding the young soldier who was known in the army as Graydon Donaldson, and taking the papers with him he returned to the storekeeper's and again presented himself before Miss Creola Gray, his handsome face clouded at the news he had to break to her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DESERTER AND HIS SISTER.

CREOLA GRAY sat hand-in-hand with Beatrice Buckner, as my heroine was now known at the fort, gazing out upon the scene in the parade-ground when Colonel Buckner re-entered the room.

Miss Gray was perfectly calm now, and seemed to possess wonderful power over herself, for she arose and received the colonel pleasantly, while she said:

"I have a sweet little comforter in your lovely daughter, Colonel Buckner."

"I am glad that you find her so, Miss Gray, and I knew that you would."

"But I also must endeavor to comfort you, Miss Gray, for I feel it my duty to place before you the full particulars regarding your brother's life and death."

"Should I not do so, some one not knowing your relationship to him, or the truth regarding him, would."

"I feel from your words, Colonel Buckner, that my brother was not a good soldier, that he has caused his officer trouble and perhaps brought his death upon himself."

"Bitterly I have mourned for him in the past, and I have feared an evil end for him, for he did much to wean me from him, yet still he was my brother, and dead I can respect him, can sorrow for him."

"You show the right feeling, Miss Gray, and I am glad to see that you are prepared for the worst."

"When I left you just awhile ago, I sent for full particulars regarding your brother, as I am now certain that Graydon Donaldson was,

"Permit me to read the report."

"Certainly, sir."

"Corporal Graydon Donaldson, B Troop, —th Cavalry, joined at Fort McPherson, May 1st, 18—."

"Was a good soldier for some months, and promoted to corporal for saving life of fellow-soldier at risk of his own."

"Began to drink and became neglectful of duties, unmanageable, and striking an officer when reproved, deserted; but after six months was found and arrested."

"Attempting to escape from guard-house, attacked officer of the day with a knife and was shot by him, the wound, after several months' lingering in the hospital proving fatal."

"Was buried at his request in open prairie and grave unmarked."

"Among papers left by Donaldson was proof that his name was Donald Gray, and the request that his money and all belonging to him should be buried with him."

"This request was not complied with, and there is now on hand of his in paymaster's, and quartermaster's keeping."

"One rifle, pair of revolvers, Mexican saddle and bridle, package of papers, clothing, watch and chain, and two hundred dollars in money."

"Such, Miss Gray, is the report, and there is, you see, from his papers, no doubt of his being your brother, so that all his money and belongings will be turned over to you upon your receipting for the same, for he said that he was never married."

"Now let me say to you, and I mean it for the best, that there is needed at the fort a teacher for the young children of the officers."

"We have here some forty young girls and boys, ranging from six to fourteen, and there is a school-house for them, and you can certainly get a fair recompense for your services as teacher, and if you will consent to become such, I will see the families at once and allow you to begin your duties whenever you deem fit."

"May I ask what you think of my proposition, Miss Gray?"

"Yes, do stay; you must stay at the fort, Miss Gray, for you will soon have many friends here, and teaching is congenial to you, as such have been your duties of late as governess."

"You will accept, Miss Gray, will you not?"

"I certainly cannot refuse such kind pleading, Miss Buckner, nor decline the generous offer which you, Colonel Buckner, have made to me."

"I am glad to hear this, Miss Gray."

"I am alone in the world, and I would have to go among strangers to earn a living if I left here, and here you all seem so kind to me."

"I know I shall like it, and be content at least with my little pupils."

Thus it was arranged, and the three talked over the matter for some time together.

The school-house was without the stockade walls in a lonely grove of trees, and just a pleasant walk for the children, while the storekeeper's home was pleasantly situated and away from the din of camp-life, though convenient to the officers' quarters—in fact, the storekeeper was an ex-army officer who had taken to a commercial life to make a living, and both he and his wife were most popular with all, and having no children, would be glad to have Miss Gray an inmate of their home.

When all was arranged, Colonel Buckner said:

"And now permit me to say, Miss Gray, though do as you deem best, that there need be no reason for making yourself known as the sister of Grayson Donaldson."

"I thank you, sir, and it would be best to do as you suggest."

"You have indeed been most kind to me, and I hope I may prove my appreciation in some way of all your goodness."

"We have done no more than our duty, Miss Gray," was the colonel's response, and as he walked back to his home with Beatrice, he asked:

"Well, my child, what do you think of Miss Gray?"

"I wish to like her, Papa Buckner, and hope she will allow me to do so; but somehow I feel that she is a woman with a history—one who wishes to veil her life."

"I hardly think so, Beatrice, for to me she seems as innocent as a child, and certainly I never saw a handsomer woman."

"Yes, handsome, dangerously handsome, for she reminds me of the descriptions I have read of Cleopatra."

"And so she struck me," said the colonel, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DASHING CHARLIE'S STILL HUNT.

I WILL now return to Dashing Charlie, after he left Fort Blank to start upon his hunt for some clew of the missing *aide-de-camp*.

He had gotten the consent of Colonel Buckner to send Red Soldier, the Pawnee chief, to aid him, and he gave the Indian, in his own tongue, which he spoke well, the full particulars of the officer's mysterious disappearance.

Red Soldier went straight to the timber, where the officer had been left with the two

outlaws, and then on his way along the trail, intending to meet at the rendezvous appointed with the scout.

But, unfortunately for the chief, he struck the jug of fire-water, and that ended his good intentions, as has been seen.

Dashing Charlie started upon the trail once more from the timber.

He was going to leave nothing undone that might give a new clew to work on.

He took in everything, and went along the trail to the stream where the young officer's tracks had last been seen.

Left to his own judgment he worked better, and when he got to the graves of the two outlaws supposed to have been killed by the *aide* he began the closest investigation.

He spent over an hour there, and then took out a foot rule and began certain measurements of the boot-tracks.

"There is a slight difference in the size of these tracks, though they are nearly the same."

"Then, too, though the boots had high heels, these tracks were made by a smaller than that one."

"The fact is, Lieutenant Gibbs came here with those outlaws, but these tracks going on from here, though appearing to be his, are not."

"No; he rode from here, and some one else walked."

"Now, to go back to the timber and see who that boot-track belonged to, if it is there."

So musing, he returned to the spot where the *aide* had been ambushed when with Beatrice and the soldiers.

He found the tracks of Muello, the Mexican's, horse, and then looked for the rider's.

He soon found them, and, after a close examination and measurement, said:

"The tracks leading to the stream are Muello, the Mexican's."

"I believe that Lieutenant Gibbs is his prisoner."

"Muello walked to the stream and into the water, then mounting, and that led to the belief that the tracks, being Lieutenant Gibbs's, he had wandered into the stream when wounded and been swept away by the swift current."

"If the lieutenant was along, then he was on horseback and a prisoner."

"Now to follow the trails beyond the stream, not forgetting that of my Double, either."

Having become convinced that he was now right, the scout returned to his horse, mounted, and rode away.

Crossing the stream he went up through the mountains to the counterfeiter's cabin, where he had left the roan horse.

He found the animal in the corral where he had left him, and the note as he had left it, for of course he had not expected the borderman ally of his Double to visit the place except in spirit form.

But the counterfeiter himself had not returned, so had surely left.

That night he passed in the cabin, and departing the next morning he rode the captured roan leaving Comanche to follow.

He went back to the Robbers' Range and sought a spot where they could keep hidden and start out on their trail-hunting from.

There he left the roan and went to meet the Indian at the rendezvous, to come upon him in his death-grapple with the bear.

Having gotten Red Soldier in condition to ride to the fort he had started him off, as has been seen, with word to the colonel that he believed Lieutenant Gibbs to be alive.

Then it was that Dashing Charlie returned to the corral where he had left the counterfeiter's roan corralled, and established a temporary camp.

He had chosen a spot well up in the Robbers' Range, and some forty miles from Fort Blank, while by mountain trails it was as many more to Valley Camps.

The spot chosen was a basin in the mountains, reached by wading up a small stream that crossed the trail.

It had been a hard climb at times for the horses, but they had reached it without accident, and leaving no trail Dashing Charlie knew that he would be safe there.

The finest of grass and water was there in abundance, and by blocking the end of the basin with a few rocks and boughs he could leave both horses free to range about without fear of their straying while he was away.

By walking a mile in any direction he gained points of lookout on all sides, and could see several mountain trails for miles.

He had with him his field-glass, plenty of provisions, for he had prepared for Red Soldier as well as himself, the outfit of the dead Black Bravo slain by the Indian, a soldier's uniform and the garbs of an Indian chief, miner and old frontiersman, with false beards and wig.

He had set out to find the end of the trail he was on, and had prepared for disguising himself even as a Black Bravo if it had to be done.

Having arranged his camp in the mountains, Dashing Charlie began work.

He recalled that Si Slick's coach came along the mountain-trail, some ten miles north of him, the following day, and he decided to let it overhaul him on the road and thus go along through

the outlaws' country, hoping that they would hold up the stage and give him a close look at the Black Bravos.

He disguised himself completely, was picked up by the coach, though Si Slick at first regarded him with suspicion, and his device the reader recalls was eminently successful, for he got as close a look at the Marauders as even he could desire under the circumstances.

The chief was masked, thus completely shielding his face, while his hands were gloved with gauntlets, but one was removed when he took the ring from his finger to give to Creola Gray, and place hers upon the small finger of his left hand.

The scout noticed the small, shapely white hand of the outlaw chief and then took a very close observation of the boots he wore.

Then too the face of every one of outlaws, and their make-up, was indelibly stamped upon his memory.

When he had left the coach, after seeing it roll on he started back up the trail, and in good time came to the scene of the hold-up.

"They are gone, and here are tracks galore for me to study."

"Now to work in earnest," he said to himself, and he was just preparing for work when he heard the ominous words:

"Hands up there, old man!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE COUNTERPART.

THE first thought of Dashing Charlie, when he heard the ominous words addressed to him were to draw his revolver and take chances while he fought his foe.

His hope was that he might stand as good a chance as his enemy.

But men think quick when death confronts them, the brain is as keen as a razor, and thoughts fly like arrows, so Dashing Charlie changed his mind as quickly as it was formed.

He believed that the outlaws were still there, in hiding, for some reason known to themselves, and he blamed himself for not having scouted the place so as to find out if all was safe.

But he had heard the threatening words, and in spite of his thoughts and resolves he replied in a moment of time, having formed his plan of action.

With a laugh he replied:

"Up goes my paws, pard, and ef yer hain't got ther drop on me I are a sinner; but don't shoot for I are innocent."

"I know you now, for you are the old borderman who was a passenger in the coach half an hour ago."

"Right yer are, pard. I are."

"What brought you back here?"

"My legs."

"Come, no funny business with me, for I am not to be trifled with."

"I were born funny, pard, so don't git r'iled at my leetle joke."

"I asked you why you came here?"

"You axed me what brought me here, pard, and I said my legs; but does yer now want ter know why I came?"

"I do."

"Is it your business ter know?"

"You will find out if you don't answer."

"Waal, ther leddy in ther old huss said she dropped a diamond ring quiet-like in ther trail, hopin' it w'u'dn't be seen, and she axed me ter come back and git it fer her, and she'd pay me liberal, don't yer see?"

"Ahl that was it?"

"Yas, pard."

"Well, I came back here to find one of her diamond ear-rings, which the chief said he dropped."

"Then, you is all alone?"

"No, I have my gun with me," was the significant response.

"I see, and she is p'inted at me."

"It is."

"Waal, ef yer hain't got nothin' ag'in' me, I'd like ter levant."

"Lay your weapons down at your feet."

"Does yer mean it?"

"Did you hear me?"

"I hain't deaf."

"Do as I tell you, or I pull trigger."

The scout slowly unbuckled his belt of arms and laid them on the ground at his feet.

"Now, step back ten paces as I count."

The paces were counted and the scout obeyed.

Then the man who had halted him came from among the rocks where he had been hidden.

At the first glance at him the scout started, and but for his excellent disguise his countenance might have betrayed him, for the man he saw before him was none other than his Double.

There he was and no mistake—the counterfeiter.

He was dressed in the black garb of the Bravos, hat and all, but he was startlingly like Dashing Charlie in face and form.

"He is as like me as a twin brother could be."

"I feel as though I was looking in the glass at myself," muttered Dashing Charlie, perfectly astounded at the counterpart of himself.

The man advanced toward the scout, his re-

volver held ready to fire, and his walk was the same as Dashing Charlie's.

"Waal, pard, I don't think I is mistaken in calling the turn on you."

"What do you mean?"

"I kin call your name."

The man started and eyed the scout curiously, while he asked:

"What is it?"

"S'pose I calls yer Pard Larry?"

The man started again and asked:

"Larry, you say?"

"Yas, pard, and yer is ther man I is s'archin for."

"Well, you have found me."

"Not as I expected ter find yer."

"How is that?"

"Yer see, I are ther true pard o' Buckskin Bill."

"What?"

"Yer knows Buckskin Bill?"

"I have met him."

"Waal, I guesses yer have, seein' as you and thet gent hev been pards in biz fer some leetle time, and I are here now ter do yer a favor."

"What favor can you do me?"

"I'll jist tell yer, and you kin count on me ter stand by yer ontill death do us part, for a friend o' Buckskin Bill's is a friend o' mine."

"Well?"

"Maybe yer has heard him speak o' Doc Simmonds, ther trapper?"

"I believe I have."

"I is Doc Simmonds, ther trapper."

"No?"

"Yas, I is, and me and Buckskin Bill hev been pards fer years, fer he saved my scalp years ago, and I hain't forgot it."

"What has this to do with me?"

"I'll tell yer."

"Hurry up, then."

"Is you in a hurry?"

"I am."

"Waal, I hain't, now I has found you."

"You were looking for me?"

"I was."

"What for?"

"To save yer life."

"I am not in danger."

"Maybe you think so now you has escaped."

"Escaped from whom?"

"The Black Bravos."

"I have not escaped."

"Then I is here ter help you out."

"I don't wish any help."

"Now, jist listen to that."

"Is yer mind leaving you?"

"No."

"Waal, I come ter help yer out o' ther hands o' ther Philistines."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Yer see, I goes down ter Buckskin Bill's cabin ter make him a visit, and I found it all locked up."

"But afore I got away up comes poor Bill jist a-hanging onto his horse, for he was almost dead, being wounded."

"Wounded?"

"Sart'n."

"How?"

"Shotted."

"Who by?"

"A Black Bravo."

"Ahl when was this?"

"Some days ago."

"Waal, I tuk him in and put him ter bed, and being a horse-doctor when I were young I set ter work a-doctoring him up, he hurrying me all ther time."

"Yes."

"When I had got him ter rights as well as I c'u'd patch him up, says he ter me thet he hed been coming along ther trail on ther Range to ther south o' this, on his way home, when he went inter camp on ther hills and while thar was you."

"How?"

"Yas, and he were jist going ter hail yer when he seen yer held up by ther Black Bravos."

"Of course he c'u'dn't do nothin', as there was a gang of 'em, but it well-nigh broke his heart ter see yer made prisoner, and so he were goin' ter see what he c'u'd do."

"While he were a-trallin' yer, he come upon a Black Bravo and ther were a shootin' picnic followed."

"Yes."

"And though my poor pard kilt ther Black Bravo he got ther wound I tell yer of, so went home ter lie up and thar he found me."

"Now says he ter me:

"Doc, my dear pard, I knows you from 'way-back, and I wants yer ter go and rescoo my friend and boss, Cap'n Larry, for he called yer cap'n."

"Says I ter him I'd do it, and so I jist tuk ther old huss fer these parts, and when I got by I jist said I w'u'd walk, so I come back ter take ther trail o' ther Black Bravos right here and foller them to ther camp whar I expected ter rescoo you."

"Does yer see?"

"Yes, I see how it is, my good friend; but how about that diamond ring the lady dropped?"

"That was all a lie, pard," was the answer of the disguised scout with a laugh.

CHAPTER L.

A LIE WELL TOLD.

"It was all a lie you have just heard, as well as about the ring; but I hit the idea pretty well, after all, about your being captured by the road-agents, for I half believed that you were an ally."

"Now to see if my lie well told pans out all right."

The above was what flashed through Dashing Charlie's brain, and of course was not spoken aloud.

His brain was busy while the counterfeiter stood in deep meditation.

He was thinking of how Buckskin Bill tried to aid him, after he had deserted him.

Dashing Charlie had taken chances in saying that Buckskin Bill had seen the counterfeiter captured.

The trail of the counterfeiter had led to a spot where it had come upon the tracks of the Black Bravos' horses, and from the signs he had seen the scout felt that perhaps after all the man had fallen a prisoner to the outlaws, and not been allied to them.

So it was that he had told the story he had, and told it well, too.

At last the counterfeiter spoke and asked:

"Do you know anything about Buckskin's business with me?"

"Waal, I got rid o' some o' ther 'lasters fer him and you."

"Then you do know, I see."

"And he give me some, which I has here, ter pay my way with, and ter buy you out, for it goes with them as don't know, same as good money."

"And the Bravos did not find it?"

"When they s'arched me, it were in ther coach, don't yer see?"

"And Buckskin Bill told you to come and rescue me?"

"That is way I am here, arter you."

"Is his wound fatal?"

"It's death, ef that's wnat yer mean."

"Well, I feel very grateful to Bill, and sorry for him, too, and I thank you very much for your coming to rescue me; but the truth is, I came up here to join the Black Bravos."

"I became fearful that that Wild West Detective, Dashing Charlie, was on my track, and as I wished to make more of the queer and get rid of it, I came here to do it, knowing that I would be safe while at work."

"The chief received me kindly, and here I am going to stay until I get ready to leave the country, and that will only be when I have gathered in good money for bad until I am satisfied I have enough for my needs."

"The chief has given me a safe retreat to work in, not far from here, and you can tell Buckskin Bill that I shall remain."

"He'll be awful sorry, for he thinks a heap o' you; but then I hardly think he'll pull through, so I wishes yer could return with me and see him, if only ter wish him good-luck on ther Shadow Trail he's going ter take."

"No, I cannot go, for I will not trust myself out of these mountains; but I am glad I told the chief I would ride back here and look up that crossing, for if you had followed, you might have lost your life, for the outlaws keep a close watch all the time."

"Waal, pard, I wants yer ter do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"Jist write poor Bill a letter, and send him a leetle money, for ef he sh'ud live he'll need it, as I'll take him to ther settlements fer ther doctor ter fix him up."

"I have nothing with me to write a letter with, nor have I any money about me."

"Now, pard, Bill hev sent me here ter save you, as he thought, so don't go back on him and me, for maybe he will think I fooled him and didn't come, so jist go to yer place and write him that letter, and git him ther money, and I'll wait here for yer all night, ef yer says so."

The counterfeiter was silent a moment, and then said:

"You take big chances in remaining here."

"I took big chances ter come and rescoo you, Pard Larry."

"Yes, you did; but I would not wish the Bravos to see you."

"No, and I doesn't want 'um ter see me jist now, nuther; but I'll risk hidin' here if yer'll go to yer camp and write poor Bill a few lines ter cheer him up, even if yer don't send him ther queer."

Again was the counterfeiter silent, but at last he said:

"I'll do it, so you go into hiding here until my return."

"If I can come back to-night I will, but I do not wish to excite suspicion, and I'll give the hoot of an owl as a signal."

"All right, pard."

"If I cannot come to-night I will to-morrow, and you can see me then?"

"I'll wait if it's ontill Christmas, Pard Larry."

"Well, I'll come, never fear, and I won't forget you for risking all you did for me."

"You might look for that earring, and if you find it I'll pay you well; but it's nearly dark now."

"I has good eyes, pard."

"If I come to-night I will be on foot, but if to-morrow I will ride."

"I'll be on hand whether yer comes foot or horseback, Pard Larry."

After a few more words together the counterfeiter turned and walked away, going down the range, while the scout went to look for the piece of jewelry.

Almost the first thing his eyes fell upon was the earring, and quickly he picked it up, though still pretending to be looking as long as the counterfeiter was in sight.

The latter had mounted his horse and was going at a slow gait.

But the moment he had disappeared the scout was upon his trail.

He kept him in sight steadily, ever ready to drop down if he attempted to turn, and his weapons having been returned to him he felt that he was a match for him, though he had had a revolver in his pocket when his enemy thought he was wholly disarmed, and intended using it too had not matters turned out to his advantage.

A mile from the starting-place the counterfeiter turned sharply off the trail up a narrow canyon.

It was growing dark, but the scout hastened on and kept his man in sight, gaining on him until close behind, and seeing him dismount he muttered to himself:

"Now I have you! My lie was not told in vain."

CHAPTER LI.

A BOLD GAME TO PLAY.

THE canyon into which the counterfeiter had gone was a narrow place, hardly ten feet in width at the entrance, but widening toward the end into a basin with high, steep cliffs overhanging it.

There was a small tent in a clump of trees, and a horse was feeding near, as the scout saw when the counterfeiter threw some wood upon a fire that was nearly out.

The bright blaze illumined the basin thoroughly, and Dashing Charlie beheld the counterfeiter moving about, then sit down to a table set on cross-sticks and begin to write.

"He intends to return to-night," he muttered, as he watched the movements of the man about his tent.

Then he saw him coming down the canyon, and he hastened back himself toward the pass.

So he kept on ahead of him and out of sight until he reached the spot where he had parted with him.

True to his promise, the counterfeiter had returned, and he gave a hoot in imitation of an owl.

Instantly the scout appeared, and the counterfeiter said:

"Well, I am here, and I did as you asked me, and wrote Buckskin Bill a letter."

"That was good of you, Pard Larry."

"And I got some money for him and for you."

"Some good money, or plasters?"

"Sh! it's the queer; but it will pass just as well."

"I don't doubt it, pard; but let me salt it away, and then give me yer hand in a partin' grip."

The scout put the letter and money in his pockets, then extended his hand, as if to grasp that of the counterfeiter.

But he had extended his left hand, and caught the man by his right wrist with a grip of steel, while he bent the arm backward, and leveling his revolver with his right, said in a voice there was no mistaking:

"Just utter a cry and you are a dead man, for yonder are soldiers enough to make a sieve of your body if I give the word to fire."

"My God! who are you?"

"Your master!" came the stern response.

"Curses upon you, I—"

"Don't do it, or I pull trigger."

"Move and you shall be bayoneted!"

As Dashing Charlie spoke, he forced the man to the ground, and throwing him upon his face, in an instant had cut his belt with his sharp bowie-knife.

Then, with a strength that was irresistible he clasped a pair of irons upon the wrists of his prisoner, and forced a gag into his mouth.

"Now, pard, I will leave you for awhile, but not for long," he said, as he led the enraged and fairly frightened prisoner into the timber and securely bound him to a tree.

"I guess you'll be safe until my return," he added, and he at once walked away.

He had not gone very far before he stopped and began to make a change in his toilet, for the dress of an old borderman gave place to a suit he wore beneath it and which was the costume of the Black Bravos.

Combing out his long, yellow hair he then made up a bundle of the things he had taken off and left them by a tree while he went on his track on the trail toward the counterfeiters' camp.

"It's taking big chances, but I guess I

can play the game in a long hand, as I hold trumps," he said as he went along.

Reaching the camp he found the fire again burning low; but no one was about and the horse was still feeding near.

So he got the saddle and bridle from where it was hanging on a tree near the tent, and five minutes later had ridden out of the canyon.

He halted at the tree for his bundle, and again at the one to which he had secured his prisoner.

"Come, Pard Larry, I want you to mount and lose no time about it."

But the counterfeiter seemed in no humor to obey, and seizing him bodily in his arms he threw him across the horse, behind the saddle and then mounted and rode away.

"It's about a fifteen-mile ride to make, pard, but I've got to make it and get back before daylight."

"You see you have been playing Dashing Charlie so well that I am going to double on you and play Larry the Counterfeiter."

"I know you can't talk because you are gagged, and you are not dangerous for you are ironed; but you can hear and I like to be entertaining as we ride along."

"You made a mistake to believe my story about Buckskin Bill, for he is dead, was killed by my horse when he was trying to steal him."

"I had a talk with him before he died, and I saw the note you left for him in his cabin."

"I've got the note now, for I went back there to look around for you."

"Now, I have a very snug place over in the valley yonder, and there you'll find your roan horse which is such a good match to my stallion."

"The latter never allows any one to ride him but me, and yet I think I can persuade him to take you to the fort, for I wish to send a note by you to Colonel Buckner, who will give you a very pleasant welcome, don't you see?"

So talking, the scout kept the horse moving in a canter whenever it was possible, and when the trail was bad he would dismount and walk, as he also did at the hills.

In just two hours he arrived at the camp where he had the two roans corraled, and building a fire for light, he took his prisoner from the horse and said:

"Now to write the letter to the colonel, which you must be the bearer of."

CHAPTER LII.

AN UNWILLING COURIER.

THE letter to Colonel Buckner was hastily written, and like the other one was in the Sioux language.

It was as follows:

"CHIEF:—

"Comanche carries prisoner to you.

"He is the one who played my Double, as you will see.

"I intend now to play his Double.

"Will still trail the Little Chief Gibbs.

"THE WHITE SCALPER."

This being expressed as well as it could be in Indian words, Dashing Charlie made it fast upon the breast of the prisoner's coat.

Then he called up Comanche and put on him the saddle belonging to old Buckskin Bill, which he had brought with him from the cabin on the counterfeiter's roan.

"Now, Comanche, I don't wish any nonsense from you, and I do not intend to put a bridle on you either."

"See, this man is a prisoner, and you are to go to the fort with him."

"I will start you all right on the trail, and don't you go back on me."

"Now, Pard Larry, you have heard my directions to my horse, and he understands, for Comanche can do everything except talk."

"If you try to turn him off the trail, you will regret it, for he will sample the flesh of your legs, see if he does not."

"Now I am ready, so mount without forcing me to make you do so."

Remembering his past experience, the prisoner put his foot in the stirrup, and Dashing Charlie aided him to mount.

Comanche resented it at first, but his master's stern command subdued him, and when the scout took a lariat and began to bind the prisoner firmly to the saddle, he seemed to appreciate the situation.

And the prisoner groaned in agony at what was before him, but Dashing Charlie was merciless.

He was soon secured tightly to the saddle, his ironed hands being tied to the horn, and his feet beneath the horse.

The counterfeiter's horse had had half an hour's rest the while, so was now mounted by Dashing Charlie, who led the way from the corral barrier, down the hill, the other roan being left there in the scout's camp.

Arriving at the trail, which led directly to Fort Blank, Dashing Charlie dismounted and led Comanche to the front.

"Now, good old horse, you see the trail, and the fort is at the other end of it."

"You hear, I said the fort, and you are to take this prisoner there to Colonel Buckner."

"Take your own time, but get there, and if you see any one, run as though the devil was after you."

"Now, good-by, good horse, and go to the fort."

The scout patted the splendid horse affectionately, and Comanche gave a low whinny as though to say he understood just what was expected of him and would do it.

Then the scout said sharply:

"Comanche, go!"

With a shake of his head the horse started off at a trot.

The prisoner writhed and groaned, and turning his head quickly the horse gave him a sharp nip in the leg with his teeth.

"I warn you he will hurt you, pard, so keep quiet and take your medicine, bad as it is," said Dashing Charlie, who was trotting along by the side of the horse.

Then he stopped, but bade Comanche go on, and the well-trained animal obeyed, keeping up the same pace as before.

Until he disappeared in the gloom, Dashing Charlie watched the retreating form of the counterfeiter, and mused aloud when it had disappeared.

"Well, that is asking much of a dumb brute, to take my prisoner to the fort for me, but he will do it, I am sure.

"If he does not, then I shall be greatly disappointed in my four-footed pard, and I will lose my Double as well.

"Lordy! how he looked when he saw me come back as my natural self and felt that I had played Buckskin Bill to capture him.

"Well, Comanche got away with Buckskin Bill, and I hope he will carry the counterfeiter to the fort.

"Now I must be on my way back to my camp.

"Ha! ha! ha! I am playing it pretty strong, but I guess I can pass for Larry if Larry passed for me.

"I know the risk, but if I can make the Black Bravos believe I am the counterfeiter, then I can get away at night with his press, plates, and all his counterfeiting outfit, not to speak of plenty of his counterfeit bills.

"It is a game worth playing for, and if Comanche holds up his end all right, I will take care of mine at this end of the trail.

"But what excuse can I give for being away from camp if I meet any one, and at night, and having ridden my horse so hard?

"Ah! I have it.

"I will just keep lying as I have begun, and it will pass me through, while I'll have to pray for forgiveness afterward.

"Yes, I'll just say I missed a roll of money, and was sure I left it at my last camp before joining the band, so went after it.

"Fortunately I've got the wad of plasters the counterfeiter brought as a gift for Buckskin Bill and myself.

"If I pass muster with the chief I have no fear of any one else in the band of marauders."

"Now, horse, you have got to move and no mistake."

Mounting the counterfeiter's horse he set off at a brisk gait, and he kept it up until he reached the neighborhood of the canyon when he went in a walk.

Far down the valley he saw the glimmer of some camp-fires, which he knew must be the bivouac of the Black Bravos.

Turning into the canyon he unsaddled his horse, staked him out and turning into the camp of the counterfeiter's slept soundly until he heard a voice calling, and rising quickly beheld the outlaw chief coming up toward the tent.

"Now comes the tug of war," he said grimly, as he arose from his blankets and came out to face him, and the ordeal through which he must pass.

CHAPTER LIII.

FACING THE MUSIC.

DASHING CHARLIE arose from his blankets, or rather from the counterfeiter's blankets, feeling that he faced death with fewer odds in his favor than ever before in his life.

He was in the counterfeiter's camp, impersonating him.

He had on the dress of a Black Bravo, and was to play the part of the man who had been playing his Double.

The camp of the outlaws was down the valley almost within call, certainly within the hearing of a pistol-shot.

Perhaps Muello, the Mexican, was alone, and it might be that he had a dozen of his men in the valley awaiting him, just beyond the canyon pass.

The spot chosen for the counterfeiter had been apart from the main camp, as he had so expressed a wish to the chief to have it so.

He wished to work by himself, he had said, and wanted no interference from the men, no help in making his counterfeit money, for the secret was his own and he would not let it be known.

The chief had respected his desire, and so he had camped apart from the others.

The only ingress or egress to the canyon was through the pass, and now Muello, the Mexican, was there between Dashing Charlie and retreat.

The scout had every reason to know that the

outlaw chief would prove a very dangerous foe, for his handling of his band proved that much.

The chief was masked as was his custom, rode his splendid jet-black stallion, equipped gorgeously with Mexican trappings, and sat in front of the little A tent which had been given the counterfeiter for his quarters, for the outlaws lived under canvas, not having any regular retreat or stronghold.

Out of the tent came the scout, and he had his revolver most conveniently ready for use.

"Ah, Lennox, you have overslept yourself," he said, in a pleasant way.

"Lennox is the counterfeiter's name, then?"

"That is something to know.

"Now to lie by wholesale, for I am getting to be a champion liar."

So mused the scout in the few steps he made toward the chief.

"Yes, chief, I was worn out, for I made a long trip last night."

"Indeed?"

The chief asked the question as though surprised, but he had already seen the fresh trail of the horse going and coming after nightfall.

"Yes, I missed a roll of that money, in unpacking, so felt sure I must have left it at my last halting place."

"Where?"

"On the southern trail of the range."

"Did you go there?"

"I did, sir."

"And the money?"

"Found it just where I supposed I had left it."

"It would not have been much loss if you had left it."

"On the contrary, chief, it was a roll of five thousand dollars."

"Bad money."

"True, yet every dollar of it brings good money."

"That is true."

"Well, I got it, and was tired out when I returned, so took a long nap."

"That accounts for the trail I saw, and did not understand, while I noticed that your horse had been ridden hard in the night."

"I was wise in saying what I did," murmured Dashing Charlie, as he saw that the chief had known of the absence of the counterfeiter, as he believed him to be.

"You have been out for a ride, then, this morning, chief?"

"I rode up to the spot where we held up the coach yesterday, hoping I could find that ear-ring."

"Ah! I forgot to tell you that I found it, for you remember I told you I would search for it—here it is."

The chief grasped the piece of jewelry with a strange eagerness, which the scout could not account for.

Then he said:

"Well, I am really glad to get this, and I thank you; but now what do you think of moving camp?"

"Is not this a good place to remain, chief?"

"Suppose they send a force of cavalry out from the fort to the scene of the coach robbery?"

"True, it might be done."

"I have scouts on the cliffs watching the trails, and yet I think we might move to another camping-place of mine, and where I have left a few men with more of our traps and a prisoner."

"You would be safe there to go on with your work, and I hope you can run off a number of bills, for I can find a chance to get rid of a considerable sum, I think."

"I am ready, chief, so say the word," and it flashed through the mind of the scout:

"That prisoner whom he refers to is Lieutenant Gibbs, I am sure."

"Well, get your breakfast and then pack up, for I will be by the pass with my men within a couple of hours."

"I'll be ready; but is it a long ride?"

"Some thirty miles, and I intend to make the place a regular retreat, for a dozen men can guard it against a hundred, and then we have too much luggage to be constantly moving with it."

"I'll be ready on time," said the scout, but as the chief rode away, he added:

"Well, I ran the gantlet well."

"Now to see if that prisoner is not Lieutenant Gibbs."

CHAPTER LIV.

TRUE AS STEEL.

THE counterfeiter's feelings, at being captured so cleverly, can be better imagined than described.

He had nerve and plenty of it, while he was a man of more than ordinary strength; but when he felt the grip of Dashing Charlie upon him, he recognized that his strength was as a child's compared with his, and lost both nerve and the power of much resistance.

The story told by the pretended Doc Simmons had been so truthful in appearance, and all had the stamp of facts so thoroughly upon it, that

the counterfeiter did not for a moment have any suspicion that he was being tricked.

When he had been gagged and tied to the tree, he only saw when his captor returned who it was that he had to deal with.

In disguise he had often seen Dashing Charlie Emmett at the fort, and he had noted then the remarkable resemblance between the scout and himself, in form, bearing, face, and even the color of the hair and tone of voice.

But, disguised as he then was, Dashing Charlie did not see the resemblance between them.

This had enabled the counterfeiter to play his game of Double with marked success.

Now, when the scout returned with his roan, the counterfeiter saw that he had his Double to deal with.

He had felt a presentiment of evil, a dread that he would die by the hand of the scout, and the thought unnerved him and he was of no use to himself, the willing tool in the hands of his captor.

Gagged as he was—and the scout had been wise in stopping an outcry thus—he could not speak, though he could hear and see all.

With his hands ironed behind him, his feet bound under the horse, and his legs made fast to the saddle, he was as helpless as an infant when he started upon his ride to the fort.

He had writhed in the saddle, but a nip of Comanche's teeth had warned him that this would not do.

So it was that he rode off on his long trip to the fort.

He was suffering mental anguish, and he was in pain from his bonds, but there was no help for it.

Dashing Charlie had not bound him so that he could escape.

The horse had no bridle on, and he was at the mercy of the animal, though a bridle would have been of no use to him then.

Comanche lagged a little after being left by his master, and once he halted.

But he looked back, and seeing that he was not followed, seemed to understand that he was expected to go on alone.

So he moved on once more, descended the mountain trail carefully, and reaching the valley, set off in a rapid gallop.

This he kept up for several miles, when again he came to a piece of rough country and went slow.

The night was starlight, and yet he knew this trail well and followed it.

Day just began to dawn when he reached the scene where the two outlaws had been found dead, and Lieutenant Gibbs was not there.

Comanche shied as he passed the graves, and the heart of the counterfeiter throbbed violently, for he could discover no cause, and feared a shot from an ambush.

Then the scene of the outlaws' ambush was recalled, where the two soldiers had been shot down, and Lieutenant Gibbs had killed the outlaw.

Here the horse shied again, and the growing light revealed the graves.

At sight of them the counterfeiter shuddered.

From there on the trail seemed dotted with graves, several of them in a row and staked, showing where soldiers had fallen in the battle with the Indians, and others grouped together and unmarked, and these were numerous, being the last resting-places of the red-skins who had been slain.

Then, too, there were many dead horses scattered about, and the wolves were snapping and snarling as they picked the bones of the animals, while in the woods vultures were roosting, flapping their wings preparatory to flying down to the feast of carrion when the daylight should a little brighter grow.

All this affected the counterfeiter deeply, while Comanche neighed at times and snorted continually as he went along the sickening trail.

At last the scene of the battle was left behind, the daylight broke clear and beautiful, the sun peering over the billtops and making myriads of diamonds of the dew on leaf, grass and stone.

The mists came from the valley in clouds, the crickets chirped in the long grass and in the timber the birds sang merrily.

But all the beauties of nature were lost upon the prisoner.

Comanche, in spite of his long pull, was not in the least tired, and when he went over the ridge and beheld the distant fort, the flag flying above it, he quickened his trot to a canter and rapidly neared it.

A groan came from the gagged mouth of the prisoner as he, too, beheld the fort, and he felt that his doom was sealed, the horse had been as true as steel to his master's commands and had taken him to the fort to his death.

CHAPTER LV.

PROPHECIES.

AFFAIRS at the fort were progressing in the even tenor of their way.

Of course there was the shadow resting there for the missing aide de camp, with hope that he would yet return safe and sound.

The colonel and Beatrice were among the

most hopeful, and others were wont to share their feelings when they knew that Dashing Charlie was still upon the trail of the mystery.

Red Soldier was progressing finely, but still looked as though he had had a battle royal with wild-cats.

He took his suffering philosophically, ate heartily, delivered temperance lectures to all who came near him, and swore in fair English at his not being able to be off on the trail with the scout.

Miss Creola Gray had entered upon her duties as teacher with nearly forty pupils.

The school-house was in the timber near the fort, delightfully located and within the picket-line, so was safe.

She had found her desk covered with wild flowers the morning she had opened school, and she had the prospect of at least leading a contented life.

The effects and money of her dead brother had been turned over to her, and were put in her pleasant quarters in the storekeeper's home.

No one, outside of the colonel, Beatrice and the adjutant, knew the relationship she had held to Graydon Donaldson, deserter, and there was no reason for its being known.

Beatrice had gone around herself and told the officers' wives about Miss Gray, and they had at once called upon her and entered their children in her school.

The colonel had placed a riding-horse at her disposal, and she showed that she was an accomplished horsewoman the moment she took seat in the saddle.

Ever quiet, sad-mannered and gentle, she lacked animation only, the officers said, to make her an exquisitely beautiful woman.

All invitations to enter society however she steadily resisted, and her evenings she claimed as her own and no one ever intruded upon her.

The chaplain, feeling that she had come with him to the fort, sought to take this as an excuse to be friendly, but she would accept of no intimate friendships and lived aloof to herself when outside of the school-room.

But there, among her pupils, she was idolized and appeared to be perfectly happy.

It was not long before she became known in the Bachelors' Club as the "Beautiful Mystery," and the young officers greatly regretted that they had not been able to entice her into social life in the fort, feeling that she would have been a valuable addition.

The falling of those in the Indian battle had cast its shadow also upon the fort; but then the lot of a soldier was to die for his country, and so they were regarded as heroes and thought of among their comrades as only anticipating the fate that must some day be theirs.

Grayson Gurney, the Gentleman Sport, had been off for some time on a hunt, along with his guide, Dick Darling; but then he was generally absent three-fourths of a month, and yet, when in his quarters, made himself so entertaining and hospitable that he was missed when he was away, or at least his bachelor dinners were, as they were always washed down with the best of wines.

"I can always get a drink of the best brandy or whisky, find a real Havana cigar, and enjoy a dinner at Grayson Gurney's ranch," said a young officer.

"Yes; and I enjoy my dinners more there than even the very delicious ones at the colonel's table," another added.

"By the way, has the Gentleman Sport ever yet met the Beautiful Mystery?" asked a captain of the artillery.

"Not to my knowing."

"Well, I rather think I would enjoy the pleasure of presenting those two to each other."

"Just why?"

"Oh, she is a mystery, so is he, and I would like to see them meet."

"Wonder if he would like her style?"

"That isn't the way to put it, captain."

"How then?"

"It is whether she would like his style."

"Ten to one she won't."

"Ten to one she will."

"I'll take the bet."

"Which way?"

"Well, I believe when those two—well, call them cranks—meet, they will fall in love at sight, or hate each other like Sioux and Pawnees."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Now, he is just the man to wake that statue up, to make the marble become full of life, I take it."

"Maybe, and it is just such a woman to win the Sport."

"Yes; but he is dead-gone on the colonel's daughter."

"It's a one-sided affair."

"It may be, but he has fallen in love with her, and no mistake."

"It will do him no good; my word for it."

"And are you in the lady's confidence, Surry?"

"No; but I have eyes, and a blind man even could see that Miss Buckner takes no stock in the Sport, while he is up to his ears in love with her."

"Well, gentlemen, prophecies regarding a

woman are all off, for it's beyond the ken of man what one will do."

"No wonder, for they never know themselves," growled an old bachelor, who was enjoying his pipe.

"Time will tell; but I hope Gibbs will turn up, for I have formed my little romance that he will marry the fair Beatrice, and I am open to wagers on it."

"I take it."

"I also."

"Put me down for twenty against you," and the one who had made the prophecy regarding Gibbs and Beatrice calmly entered over a dozen bets in his note-book, his face wearing a satisfied smile the while.

CHAPTER LXI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ARRIVAL.

THE pleasant sunshine and balmy air had invited many to take a stroll in the woodlands beyond the fort, and along the river-bank.

It was Saturday, and the children were free, so were gathering wild flowers for their loved teacher, who was spending her day in her rooms.

Officers and ladies were scattered about in twos, fours and groups, and all were chatting merrily together.

The colonel had also come out for a walk, along with his adjutant, and Beatrice was the center of a group of officers not far away from where he stood, and she was looking very beautiful in her close-fitting dark dress and black sombrero with its gold cord, black plume and crossed sabers of gold, the latter given her by Lieutenant Gibbs.

Looping the rim of her sombrero up on the left side was a Texas star of gold, the points being set with diamonds, the center with a ruby and bands encircling of red, white and blue.

It was a gift to her father, Richard Markham, from the Rangers he had commanded, and Beatrice prized it most highly.

Suddenly a signal from the lookout announced some one was approaching the fort.

At once all was hushed, for those were dangerous times, and the fort was situated in the midst of a country where any moment it might be a battle for life.

Would the next signal be one of warning for all to go within the stockade?

No, the next signal was that a single horseman was approaching.

He was coming at a rapid gallop, as though the bearer of news.

No couriers were expected just then, and so all were curious to know who the stranger was.

The trail ran around the timber, and toward it the groups all moved, the colonel among them.

Then came word from the officer of the day that he had recognized the horseman with his glass, and that Dashing Charlie Emmett was coming.

A shout went up at this, for he would surely have news of Lieutenant Gibbs.

Beatrice Buckner's face flushed and then paled, but she remained perfectly serene, where others became excited.

The colonel himself looked a trifle anxious, for to all, after the first burst of joy, came the thought that Dashing Charlie was coming alone.

Soon he came in sight, and the roar was in a sweeping gallop.

As nearer he approached, some one called out:

"He has no bridle on!"

This was seen to be true a moment after.

Then a voice cried:

"He is bound to his saddle!"

A groan went up as this was discovered to be the case.

"My God! what does it mean?" an officer asked.

"He is gagged!"

"Look at his mouth!"

It was then seen that a stick was thrust into his mouth, wrapped with cloth, the ends being tied by a strap passing around the back of his head.

"He is in irons!"

This, too, was seen as the horse came up on a level.

There sat the man, dressed in the scout's hunting-coat and hat, but beneath was visible a suit of black clothes.

His hands were ironed behind his back, his face was swollen, yet pallid, and his eyes had a wild stare in them as they were turned upon the crowd.

Several officers made an effort to catch the horse, but desisted when Comanche laid his ears back, gave an angry neigh and showed his teeth like a vicious dog.

Then the horse passed on to the fort, and thither all hastened.

Comanche stopped at the fort gate, and driving back those who pressed near, allowed the officer of the day to approach and begin to untie the prisoner.

He soon had the ropes loose, then, aided by another officer, for Comanche would not be crowded, lifted the man from the saddle.

He could barely stand, while the horse was sent alone to his stable, one of the officers first removing his saddle.

"My poor Emmett! you have been made to suffer greatly, I fear," said the officer of the day, as he quickly removed the gag from his mouth and sent for the surgeon.

"He has dared to enter the outlaws' camps, sir, for he wears the dress of the Black Bravos, and this is the way he has been treated," explained the officer of the day to Colonel Buckner, who just then came up.

In some way the paper, the note to Colonel Buckner, pinned upon his breast, had worked loose and was not there to tell the story, so all took the counterfeiter for the scout.

He saw this and was quick to seize upon it as a chance for escape, and he acted his part well.

"Tell me what has happened, Emmett?" the colonel said.

But he shook his head as though to say he was unable to speak yet, his mouth being dry and swollen from the gag.

His hands being ironed and no key attached, the blacksmith was sent for to come to headquarters and remove them, for thither the supposed scout was slowly led, and he seemed to move with great difficulty.

Reaching the colonel's quarters, the supposed scout was placed in the charge of a surgeon, who quickly attended to his mouth and tongue, swollen by the gag, and his limbs, which the bonds had chafed.

The blacksmith arrived and soon removed the irons, and then for the first time the man spoke in answer to Colonel Buckner's question as to what had happened:

"I was taken, captain, by the outlaws, sir, but on the march my horse slipped his bridle and I urged him to run for the fort."

CHAPTER LVII.

DENOUNCED.

IT was more than an hour after his arrival before the captain was able to talk rationally of what had happened, or before he would admit that he was.

He had time to think during this while and that was what he wished most.

He recalled the clever behavior of Dashing Charlie when he took him prisoner, and how well he had played the part of Doc Simmonds.

That all had taken him for Dashing Charlie he saw, and he must save himself by carrying out the cheat.

His nerves must not fail him, and he had the chance in his favor of playing ill if he contradicted himself or made mistakes.

Having decided thus to save himself, and he knew death stared him in the face, he nerved himself for the ordeal through which he must pass.

He had been given some food, and now came before the colonel, who, with his adjutant and Captain Dunn, were awaiting for his story.

"May I hear what Mr. Emmett has to say, father?" and Beatrice appeared in the doorway.

"Certainly, my child, for he has no secrets to tell, I believe," answered the colonel with a smile, and Beatrice came in and took a seat where she could see the scout well.

She had greeted him pleasantly, but his manner toward her was constrained, and he had hardly replied to her greeting.

"Now, Emmett, let us hear just what has occurred," said the colonel in a kindly tone.

"Yes, sir."

"You saw nothing of the lieutenant?"

"Which lieutenant, sir?"

The colonel glanced at Captain Dunn and the adjutant and looked pained, for his look showed that he feared all that the scout had passed through had unseated his mind, for he had observed other things about him which had worried him.

"Why, my aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Gibbs."

"No, sir, I did not see him."

"But you sent me word that you had some clew to prove that he was not dead."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What was it?"

A distressed look passed over the face of the counterfeiter, and feeling that he was being led into danger, he passed his hand across his forehead and said:

"I don't exactly remember, sir."

"I fear I have been hurt more than I thought."

It was cleverly said and acted, and the colonel hastened to say:

"Well, scout, tell us of yourself?"

"I intended, sir, to get into the outlaw camp, and so disguised myself as a Black Bravo; but I was caught, shamefully treated, and would have been killed had not my horse broken away, when his bridle was slipped off, and started to the fort with me."

"That is all, sir."

"It is enough, and you are to be congratulated upon your escape: but now you had better go to your quarters and seek rest, for you will come round all right then."

"I will see you to-morrow."

The man arose saluted and left the headquarters, while the colonel said:

"Well, gentlemen, I hope Emmett will come

around all right, but his mind really seems affected by what he has gone through."

"It does indeed, sir," the adjutant rejoined.

"A night's rest will fetch him round, though he does not look or act like himself," Captain Dunn added.

"There is a good reason for his not looking and acting as Dashing Charlie."

The eyes of the three officers turned upon the speaker.

It was Beatrice.

"I don't understand you, my child."

"Well, father, I denounce that man."

"Denounce him?"

"Yes, sir."

"But for what reason?"

"He is not Dashing Charlie."

"What, my child?"

"Miss Buckner is joking."

"Not Dashing Charlie?"

Such were the expressions of the three officers.

"I repeat it, that the man who just left here is not Dashing Charlie, the scout," firmly said Beatrice.

"Pray explain yourself, Beatrice," the colonel asked, slightly annoyed.

"I can only tell you my views, sir, my impressions."

"Dashing Charlie is very much like that man, and vice versa."

"This man came here mounted upon the scout's horse, wearing his coat and hat, and dressed in black."

"Yes, yes."

"He came, wearing a pair of handcuffs which Dashing Charlie got from the adjutant when he left, for I saw him, and bound with the scout's lariat."

"He says that he was captured by the outlaws, but escaped."

"Now, he hesitated at all questions asked him, did not seem to know who I was, and certainly did not understand about Lieutenant Gibbs."

"Why, my child, it was his suffering, his condition that caused this."

"Certainly, colonel," added the adjutant, while Captain Dunn said:

"I am interested in what Miss Buckner has said, and wish to hear more upon the subject."

"But, his having on the scout's irons and being bound with his lariat is only proof that the outlaws secured him with what he had with him of use to them for the purpose."

"Well, adjutant, I will go further, and say that I denounce that man as an impostor, for he was no more Dashing Charlie than I am."

"You must give your proofs, my child," the colonel said, with a smile.

"You shall have them," was the confident response of Beatrice.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BEATRICE GIVES PROOF.

THE charge of Beatrice against the counterfeiter somewhat disconcerted Colonel Buckner and his two officers.

The colonel was confident that she was mistaken, though, and the lieutenant was also.

As for Captain Dunn, he was not so much so.

He wished to hear all that she had to say.

So, when the colonel asked her for her proof, she said, with a smile:

"Of course it seems ridiculous for me, a young girl, to take a stand against you all, and to assume for myself powers of penetration beyond yours."

"But Dashing Charlie came to my rescue, and Lieutenant Gibbs's, and more, he was the devoted friend of my uncle and my own father."

"Then he came to Texas to take my father to the gold mines when Uncle Markham was dying."

"The result was that he became a hero in my eyes, and he was a very picturesque character, one to see and not forget."

"After all this harangue, let me tell you that the scout wore boots with round toes, and this man's are square toed."

"Then this man has a scar over his left eye which I am sure Dashing Charlie did not have."

"The scout was most courtly to me, and this man hardly noticed me."

"Pique," muttered the adjutant.

But Beatrice heard the word and knew all it implied, while she answered:

"No, it is not pique, sir, for I have no reason to feel a slight where none was intended."

"He simply did not know of my existence any more than he did about Lieutenant Gibbs."

"A lawyer's reasoning, that, Miss Markham," Captain Dunn remarked.

"Thank you, and I hope to gain my case, for I am sure that this man is a fraud."

"If not Dashing Charlie, who is he, my child?"

"Yes, he is certainly the image of the scout," the adjutant rejoined.

"Very true, the resemblance is startling, I admit."

"But this man's hair is not as long as the scout's by several inches."

"Then, too, this man has gray eyes, the scout's are blue."

The officers all laughed, while Captain Dunn said:

"You are a close observer, Miss Markham."

"I have been all my young life, and it has aided me greatly."

"My eyes are given me to observe more than light and darkness, and reading faces is a delightful pastime with me."

"I take likes and dislikes at a glance, and where I would trust Dashing Charlie with my life, I would not trust that man that just left here with my purse."

Again the officers laughed, for all enjoyed hearing Beatrice defend her position.

"Well, my child, if not Dashing Charlie, who is this counterpart of him?"

"Do you recall, father, that the scout when here told you that he had a Double?"

"Whew!"

"Ah!"

"Good!"

It was the colonel who whistled, the adjutant who exclaimed, while Captain Dunn had said "Good!"

Then he said quickly:

"A dead-center shot, Miss Markham, fire again."

"He said that his Double had been mistaken for him by his best friends, that he had struck his trail and was following it, when he came to the rescue of Lieutenant Gibbs and myself."

"Now here comes his Double, for I am sure that it is not the scout, and he impersonates Dashing Charlie and deceives you all."

"But he comes in irons, a prisoner, Beatrice."

"Whose prisoner, father?"

"He escaped from the outlaws."

"So he says."

"What is your theory on this point, Miss Markham?"

"I believe, Captain Dunn, that you half believe as I do, and I'll tell you that my theory is that the scout captured this man and he escaped from him."

Exclamations followed this announcement, and Colonel Buckner said:

"Well, Beatrice, though convinced that you are wrong, there is a possibility that you may be right, and so I will give you the benefit of a doubt and send for the scout so that we can, with the doubt in our minds, question him carefully."

The colonel then called his orderly and he was sent to bring the scout back to headquarters.

In a short while he came, accompanied by the counterfeiter, who, suspicious that he might have been suspected, determined to play ill.

He came in with a most woebegone look upon his face, and seemed to be nervous and wretched.

"Well, scout, I sent for you to ask you a few more questions."

"Yes, sir, but you will not let those outlaws capture me again," and he glanced quickly over his shoulder as though in terror.

"No, indeed, my good fellow, you are safe here."

"But they are so cunning, so devilish, and they beat me over the head until all seems lost to me now."

"I cannot think, I cannot remember, and I suffer so here."

He pressed his hands to his temples, as though suffering, and in pity the colonel said:

"Well, we will not question you now; another time will do, so you can return to your quarters."

"Thank you, sir; but I would like to talk, only I can't—can't remember all I wish."

"All right, go right to bed and I will send the surgeon to you."

When he was gone, the kind-hearted colonel said:

"It would be cruel to question that poor fellow, for he is really delirious now."

"So I think," said the adjutant.

To the surprise of all, Beatrice laughed, and when she saw the surprised look of her father, she said:

"That was a piece of good acting only, and I am now more than ever convinced that I am right."

"I am sure you are wrong, my child."

"Then I will give you another proof," was the determined reply of the young girl.

CHAPTER LIX.

UNDER GUARD.

THE determined manner in which Beatrice Markham asserted that she had still another proof, that the man was not Dashing Charlie, but his Double, impressed Colonel Buckner and his two officers who heard it.

"Well, Beatrice, we must have the other proof, for if there is any truth in this charge it must be known," the colonel said.

"Yes, sir, known before night, when the pretended Dashing Charlie would be sure to take French leave."

"Then let us know what else you can say to strengthen your case."

"When the surgeon examined the scout he found a severe contusion on his leg, I believe you said, father?"

"Yes."

"The man said that his horse had bitten him there, when he urged him on!"

"True."

"Now I believe it is known that Dashing Charlie possesses the most remarkable horse in the fort."

"Yes, on the frontier," the adjutant said.

"I never knew of a better animal," Captain Dunn remarked, while the adjutant slyly asked:

"Do you doubt the horse too, Miss Markham?"

Without answering him Beatrice said:

"I know that the roan is said to be the fleetest horse on the plains, and the most savage too."

"He is said to follow a scent like a dog, and to watch at night when his master sleeps."

"True."

"The scout never ties him when he camps, and he is an animal to fear, for he has killed an outlaw you know, father, as Dashing Charlie said, and one or two Indians."

"Very true."

"The soldiers stand in deadly awe of him, and no one can ride him except his master."

"Further proof that the man is the scout, Miss Markham."

"Oh, no, adjutant, not at all, for when I came here it was on the scout's horse, and if not commanded by his master to allow me to mount he never would have done so."

"When he was here we became most friendly, and I believe I was the only one in the fort he would come to or mind, except the scout."

"You are right there, my child, and you alarmed me greatly when I heard you had gone up to him."

"Now, if I was the adjutant," continued Beatrice, with a sly look at that officer, "I would wager high that the scout's horse was turned into a pen, and no one has gone near him since."

"Doubtless."

"He is not the horse to bite his master, I know, and I wish you would go, father, and see if he will allow the man who calls himself Dashing Charlie to mount him."

"I hate to disturb the poor fellow again."

"Better do so than have the poor fellow leave the fort to-night upon some one else's horse."

"You think he will not dare do so?"

"If he can mount that horse, I will almost believe that I am wrong."

"I would try it, colonel," said Captain Dunn.

"Let me see; how can it be done, Beatrice?"

"Say that you wish him to go at the head of a party to scout toward Robbers' Range."

"I'll do it."

"Tell him to report here mounted upon his own horse within half an hour."

"And I'll go and see if he can do it," Captain Dunn remarked.

"So will I," declared the adjutant.

The orderly was sent with the orders to the pretended scout, and he acquiesced at once.

"He does not hesitate, my child."

"No, father, for it gives him a chance to get out of the fort; but he has not reported yet."

Soon word came from the scout asking if he could not ride another horse, as his own was very tired.

"No, he must ride his own horse," the colonel ordered.

Half an hour passed, and then Captain Dunn and the adjutant appeared, the former smiling, the latter looking serious.

"Well, gentlemen, where is the scout?"

"His horse has turned against him, colonel," said the adjutant.

"I rather think that it is not his horse, and that Miss Buckner is right," Captain Dunn said.

"What happened, Dunn?"

"Well, sir, he begged off from riding the horse, as soon as he went out to saddle him."

"Then came your order, and he started toward him, when the horse made a rush at him that he was just able to escape."

"He took a whip and tried to conquer him, but Comanche would not let him enter the pen, and remained master of the situation."

"Had he again entered the pen that horse would have killed him, but he had better sense, and I told him I would see if you would not excuse him, as he really looked ill, and I sent him to his quarters again."

"Now, are you satisfied, father?"

"I am like a woman convinced against her will, Beatrice."

"That means of the same opinion still."

"I hardly know what to say."

"Well, I have warned you, so excuse me, please," and she withdrew from the room, leaving the officers to talk over the situation, with Captain Dunn feeling confident that she was right, after putting the different threads of her proof together.

Suddenly a voice called from without the door:

"Ah, father! see here!"

They went to the door, and there stood Beatrice with Comanche, without bridle or saddle, by her side.

"He has not forgotten me, father, for see, he follows me like a dog."

"How strange that he should turn against his

master," and the tone of Beatrice was full of sarcasm.

"She is right, and I'd swear to it," Captain Dunn emphatically said.

"I also am half convinced, for I know what that horse is," the adjutant rejoined.

"Yes, and I feel that there may be a mistake, so adjutant put that man under guard at once," was the stern order of the colonel, and he called to Beatrice to come into the house.

"I will have to take him back to his quarters, father, as he may injure some one if I do not," and this she did, the horse following her as obediently as a dog, though all they met on the way gave him a wide berth.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PRISONER.

WHEN Captain Muello and his men came along by the pass of the canyon, where the lone camp of the counterfeiter had been pitched, they found him ready awaiting them, his pack-horse loaded with his traps.

The chief called to him to ride by his side, and his pack-horse was not allowed to go back with the others, but held by a lead-rope.

The trail was a long one to the spot where the chief had decided to have his retreat.

It had been his custom to move from point to point, live in tents and have pack-horses and mules to carry his plunder.

The retreat which he had decided upon he did not intend to operate in the neighborhood of, so as to draw no suspicion upon it, and seldom to go there.

But he wished his men to know well the spot, and as several of them were on the sick-list he meant to leave them there.

Then, too, some of his horses needed shoeing and other attention, and a rest of several days there for the whole band would do no harm.

This he explained to the supposed counterfeiter as they rode along together, and furthermore he said:

"Now while there you can run off the amount of money to be gotten rid of in the next month, and I can see how best it can be done."

"Yes, sir, that is so," said Dashing Charlie.

The scout felt his peril, for he was, like his Double, playing a game of life and death.

The chances were slightly in favor of the scout, as no one appeared to suspect the change—the metamorphosis from a villain to an honest man.

There was no likelihood of the scout being suspected of being other than the counterfeiter, though the outlaws might suspect him of treachery, though it was not probable.

What his future intention was he had not decided.

He would be governed wholly by circumstances, and he would act as he deemed best when the time came for action.

But he wished to guard against any mistake, wished to be ready to take advantage of all that might turn up in his favor.

He had come to the conclusion that the prisoner in the outlaws' retreat was Lieutenant Gibbs.

The chief had not spoken of him other than to refer to his having a prisoner, and Dashing Charlie dared not be curious.

He must bide his time, but he determined to get his camp pitched in as favorable a position for action as he could.

He would have given much to have had Comanche with him, but then he had not, and therefore must be satisfied with the horse he had, which was, however, a very good one.

The scout had made discoveries that pleased him.

If Comanche had done his duty, then he had the counterfeiter a prisoner at the fort.

That was a great feather in his cap.

With him he had the traps of the counterfeiter, his press, plates, paper and bogus money, for such he believed the pack contained.

This was another triumph, for it would be getting the counterfeiter and his tools.

His ally, Buckskin Bill, was dead, and the counterfeiter therefore had no other ally to hunt down.

He had allied himself to Muello, the Mexican, to spread his counterfeit money, and to be protected while making it, but having changed places with the counterfeiter, he, Dashing Charlie, was master of the situation wholly.

He had discovered that the Black Bravos numbered two dozen men, with a masked chief at their head whom no one knew, among his men even.

That they moved from camp to camp, carrying some thirty extra horses and a large number of pack-mules, and were thoroughly armed, splendidly mounted, and had a range of a couple of hundred miles along the border.

That the chief was now going to establish a regular retreat, and had there some plunder, extra animals, several wounded men and also a prisoner.

Taking all these things into consideration that he had found out, in spite of his peril, Dashing Charlie was in a good humor with himself and the world.

Not sure that Comanche had taken his man to the fort, there was of course danger that he

might come after the outlaws at any time, and that meant death to him, unless he could get his Double hanged as Dashing Charlie.

Of course wherever the prisoner was, the scout intended to aid him, but there would be great difficulty in getting away from the outlaw retreat he well knew.

The chief certainly seemed most friendly toward him, and appeared glad to have him along as his companion.

He asked him much about the profession of counterfeiting, all of which the scout explained to suit himself, not knowing anything about it.

At last the chief said:

"Well, our retreat is near, and you can see by the nature of the country that it will be a hard place to reach even if not defended."

"It will indeed, chief, and I am sure nothing short of a regiment would follow you here."

"Well; here we are turning into the canyon," and five minutes after the chief rode up to a camp where several men were visible, one of whom was seated on the ground and heavily ironed.

"My God! it is the lieutenant," muttered the scout, just as the officer cried:

"Ho, Dashing Charlie, have they captured you also?"

CHAPTER LXI.

TWO TO ONE.

As it is known that the young lieutenant is a prisoner in the hands of the Black Bravos, it will be as well to explain how it came about.

It will be remembered that the officer remained with the two outlaws in the timber, while Dashing Charlie made for the fort with Beatrice before him on his horse.

The Indians were pressing on upon the scout's trail, and anxious to turn the red-skins from the timber where the officer was, Dashing Charlie, with full confidence in his horse and himself, had ridden in a direction for them to see him.

As he had expected, they gave chase, thus avoiding the timber.

Of course it was rather a perilous position for the officer, for he had freed two of his foes.

There lay the dead soldiers and the outlaw whom Lieutenant Gibbs had killed, and they were a warning of what his fate might be.

The two men were of course allowed their weapons, and all stood ready to stand the Indians off as best they could.

"Men, we must fight for it, and, as I promised to let you go free, I will keep my word if you do your duty."

"The young lady is safe, as you see, and all we have to do is to act bravely and stand together."

"Do you intend to back me up or not?"

"To the end, Pard Cap'n," said one.

"It's kill for all of us, if we don't, cap'n," the other remarked.

Then the three stood watching the Indians until assured that they were not coming to the timber, at least at that time.

"Now, cap'n, don't yer think it w'd be well ter git a leetle out o' ther way and find a better fightin'-ground than this be, for my idee is that those thar Injuns is a-coming this way to-night?"

Convinced that the outlaw was right, Lieutenant Gibbs acquiesced in their desire to hunt a better place of defense, and so the three moved down the valley.

They had found a good spot, and the officer had bidden them take up a position in front of him, for he was still doubtful of their good intentions, when, as if by common consent, they both wheeled and opened fire upon him.

Fortunately, just where he stood there was a large bowlder, and in an instant he had dropped down behind it and returned the fire, for he had not been hit, though the misses had been very close ones.

His first shot brought down one of the outlaws, and at that instant the other, in desperate danger of his life, rushed in upon him.

The fight was a short, sharp and fatal one, for the lieutenant killed the second outlaw.

Panting from the struggle, which had been a severe one, he had barely risen to his feet when he heard a voice behind him utter the threatening words:

"Stand, or die!"

"Hands up, Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs!"

One look showed the officer that resistance was useless, for there knelt the outlaw chief behind the bowlder that had been his safety a few moments before.

During the combat he had appeared upon the scene, and though not in time to save his men from death, he was there to force the officer to terms.

Fred Gibbs had been wounded in his last struggle, though slightly, and the disappointment of being taken prisoner again was terrible, but he knew that he had a desperate man to deal with and that he was wholly at his mercy, for the chief held all the advantage.

But he surrendered with good grace, by saying:

"Well, Muello, the Mexican, you hold the winning hand, and I can but submit."

"What is your pleasure?"

"For you to throw down your weapons."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Well, I don't wish to kill you, but if you force me to it I will."

"Surrender quickly, and I think we can come to terms."

"On a ransom, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, as I have to submit, there are my weapons."

He dashed his belt to the ground as he spoke.

"You have no hidden weapons?"

"No."

"Upon your honor as an officer?"

"Yes."

"Now, sir, I must put the irons upon you again, for see, I go prepared."

The officer made no reply, and held out his hands when commanded to do so.

"Now, sir, you are to mount that horse, for you see I have caught the animals of my men, which stampeded when that devil Dashing Charlie appeared."

"Why did you not remain and fight him?"

"I thought he had a company of cavalry at his heels."

"You saw only the scout, and ran off like a coward."

"Well, I have you a prisoner again, and it will go hard with you if you don't do as I command you."

"I am not a fool to do what I know will harm me."

"Then mount that horse."

"All right, lead him up to the bowlder, for I am in irons as you see."

The outlaw obeyed, and the officer mounted one of the outlaw's horses.

"Now I know what a clever scout Dashing Charlie is, and I see a chance to throw him off my trail."

"It will be a hard thing to do."

"Yes, but see me try it."

He then fastened the three horses together, and took the lead-line and put it over the horn of his own saddle.

"You see, Dashing Charlie will return on your trail."

"He will find that you left the timber with my two men, and came here."

"They being dead will show that you killed them, and as I observe we wear a boot very much alike and about the same size, my tracks will be mistaken for yours."

"I will go on foot, and you will ride to the stream not far from here."

"And the scout will follow."

"It may be, but I can throw him off the trail."

"I doubt it."

"Wait and see."

So the chief walked on to the stream, and a grim smile flitted over his face as he said:

"Well, I see a chance to make a suicide of you."

"How so?"

"I will walk into this stream, and they will believe that you have been forced to drown yourself, or have been drowned by accident."

The officer made no reply, and while standing in the stream nearly up to his boot-tops, the outlaw chief mounted his horse and headed him for the other shore, leading the others after him.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE THREAT.

THE outlaw was not by any means at ease, although he had his prisoner beyond all resistance or escape.

He knew that he was dangerously near the fort, and a scouting party of cavalry might be met at any moment.

Then, too, he feared they might run upon a band of the red-skins, and he would have to set his prisoner free to help defend themselves.

Again, he was separated from his men, and did not know whether the party sent after those who had escaped with the guide of Lieutenant Gibbs had been captured or not.

He knew that Beatrice had escaped him, and he was very sure that Lieutenant Gibbs was aware of where the Markham gold was buried.

So the chief pressed on, most anxious to reach a rendezvous where he knew his men would join him, when night came on.

This rendezvous he did reach, and it was as he had felt it would be, his men began to drop in by twos and threes.

The party sent after the guide reported their inability to capture them.

They had reached too near the fort for them to venture closer when they came in sight of them.

The others had come in, too, from their different stands, and the chief had to admit the loss of the gold, the escape of Beatrice, and the death of three of his men.

As an offset to this he had Lieutenant Fred Gibbs as a prisoner, and if he could force from him the secret of the treasure's hiding-place, then he would be repaid for all.

After a halt of a couple of hours at the rendezvous, he ordered his men to mount, and they

started on a night march for the retreat which has been referred to.

It was the following morning before they arrived, and the chief at once set to work to see what he could do with his prisoner.

Fred Gibbs had taken his captivity very quietly.

He had eaten a hearty supper and breakfast, and not a cloud had crossed his handsome face to show that he felt the deepest chagrin at his capture.

He was tired after his long ride from Texas, anxious about Beatrice, and his throat pained him from the shaking he had undergone.

Then, too, he had a flesh-wound in his shoulder, which the chief had dressed for him.

But for all his misfortunes, the officer was more cheery in his manner than was Muello, the Mexican.

When they had had their noonday meal in the retreat, Muello came to the point at once with the remark:

"See here, Lieutenant Gibbs, I know you are a brave fellow, and all that; but you are young, handsome, well off, I have heard, and love life, for you doubtless have the chance of winning your pretty cousin some day."

"Well, sir?"

"Now she has a fair inheritance, I have heard, from her father, and your allied fortunes would make you most comfortable when married."

"To what does all this tend?"

"Just this:

"She had left her by her miner uncle a fortune in gold worth all of a quarter of a million dollars, as I have heard it reported to me."

"Now that fortune her father hid away on the trail when I was pursuing him."

"He did."

"And cheated me out of it."

"It was his daughter's."

"All right, but we will say that the fortune was hidden and I want it."

"Get it, then."

"I intend to."

"How?"

"Through you."

"You never can."

"We will see."

"All right."

"Now I do not believe the girl does know where the gold is, but I am very sure you do."

"I?"

"Yes."

"I do not."

"I feel that you do, and I have to say that if you do not, you have the maps and papers that will lead you to it."

Fred Gibbs laughed, but made no reply.

"Now I wish to come to terms with you."

"I am willing."

"Now you are wise."

"Name my ransom."

"Your ransom?"

"Yes, but don't go too high, for I am not as rich as you think."

"You are willing to pay for your freedom?"

"Well, yes."

"How much?"

"Any sum within reason."

"Then I shall name the papers and maps that lead to the finding of Markham's gold."

"You are a fool."

"What?"

"I would only pay my own money for my ransom, not that of another."

"Well, you will give me the information I ask or have to die."

"I can die but once."

"You will surely not be such a fool as to throw your life away!"

"I am a soldier, and it may be my lot to die at any time."

"I love life, yes, and I hope to live long to enjoy the goods of this world, but I am not going to sell myself to you, and the sooner we understand each other thoroughly, Muello, the Mexican, the better for both of us."

"By Heaven, but I will force you to terms!"

"How can you?"

"By torture."

"You did not do that when you hanged me."

"I will starve you to death."

"Many a poor devil is starving to death now in this world in the very midst of plenty."

"But you shall be tortured with your starving."

"See here, I do not fear to meet any fate others have suffered before me."

"Set to work and relieve me of your hateful presence."

"I will keep my threat; but I will give you a chance for life."

"What is it?"

"When you decide to accept my terms, say so to the man who will have charge of you, and your punishment shall cease."

"All right."

"Then when I return let me know what you will do."

"I will."

And thus they parted, the officer to remain a prisoner in the retreat, and the outlaw chief to again go upon the trail with his men, taking up their position nearer the fort than was their wont.

CHAPTER LXIII.

FOILED.

WHEN the chief left the retreat, he placed over Lieutenant Gibbs one of his most trusted men.

He was a man known as "Doctor," and was really a physician, or had been up to the time that he was driven to the life of an outlaw.

He was a savage-looking fellow, without an atom of mercy in his make-up, and when the officer studied his face, he knew that an appeal there was useless, no matter what the bribe offered.

The prisoner was given quarters to himself in a tent, and yet he was ironed hands and feet, and a chain held him to a tree, giving him some twenty feet to walk about.

There were other men at the retreat also, half a dozen of them, several being wounded, or on the sick leave.

But there were enough to keep one man constantly on the watch for the officer.

The Doctor had his orders from the chief, and he meant to carry them out faithfully.

They were to begin starving him at once, and other treatment that would become a torture to him.

The treatment was begun before the chief had been gone a day, and Fred Gibbs was very quick in showing his good sound sense.

He had not the remotest idea of being made to suffer when he could avoid it.

So when his first heroic dose was administered, he waited a while and then said:

"See here, Doctor, I can't stand this long."

"You are right."

"About how long will it take to kill me?"

"Say a week."

"On Lord!"

"You need not die unless you wish."

"How is that?"

"Just confess to me about that gold and I'll treat you well."

"I cannot confess about it."

"You'll have to suffer, then."

"I'll tell you what I will do."

"Well?"

"You see, to have brought maps and directions of where to find the gold would have been unsafe, would it not?"

"It would, for fear of capture."

"That is just it, and so I would have to draw them from memory."

"Ah!"

"Yes, I would have to draw the trails, distances and all that, and write down the directions."

"Well, do so, and I'll tell you what we'll do."

"What is that?"

"We'll go together after that gold, and give the chief the slip."

"Oh no, you don't fool me that way, for I know you are too true to the chief to play that game of treachery upon him," said the officer, but he saw that the man had intended just what he said.

"Well, try me."

"No, I will not do that."

"Why?"

"Because I know you are deceiving me, and not the chief."

"No."

"Well, I think so."

"What will you do, then?"

"Draw a map for the chief when he returns."

"Will you do this?"

"Yes."

"All right, I'll tell him, and I'll let up on you."

"You mean you will not starve and torture me?"

"I will not."

"You are very kind."

"Don't mention it," and it was very transparent that Doctor, the outlaw guard, was deeply chagrined at not having won the officer over to his way of thinking.

But to save himself he said:

"Now you are a good reader of human nature, captain, for I meant to get that map and keep it for the chief, for fear you might back out in your good intention."

"But you read me aright, for never could I prove a traitor to him."

"You look it, Doctor," and as his guard walked away he congratulated himself upon having at least saved himself much suffering.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE RECOGNITION.

WHEN Muello, the Mexican, rode into his retreat, with, as he believed, Lawrence Lennox, the counterfeiter, by his side, he went directly up to where his tent would be placed, when taken from the pack mules.

Then not far away was the tent of the prisoner, and Fred Gibbs sat there on a log calmly viewing his approach.

That he had not intended to betray what he knew about the treasure, the reader can understand, knowing the noble character of the young officer.

He had simply saved himself from the torture, and what he intended to do was to draw a map, allowing the chief to go off in search of the gold, hoping during his stay he would be rescued by the soldiers, for he had perfect confidence in Dashing Charlie's ability to lead them in time to the retreat of the Black Bravos.

Now as he saw the outlaws returning, he did not at first recognize Dashing Charlie, dressed as he was in the garb of an outlaw.

When at last the chief and Dashing Charlie halted near him, a pain shot through his heart as he saw the scout, for he could only believe him to be a prisoner.

So it was that at the mutual recognition he called out:

"Ho, Dashing Charlie, have they captured you, too?"

The chief started at the words and glanced quickly toward his companion; but though taken aback, Dashing Charlie was equal to the occasion, for he replied promptly:

"So I pass muster with you, too, do I, sir, as Dashing Charlie, and I have heard that you and the scout were great friends."

"I am, and if you are not he, then you are—"

"Who?"

"His Double."

"Now you have hit the nail on the head, exactly."

"You are his Double?"

"I am."

"And an outlaw?"

"Well, yes, for the chief here is my friend."

"You appear to know me?"

"I do."

"What is my name?"

"Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs, and you are the aide to Colonel Buckner."

"Strange that I never saw you before."

"Oh, yes, you have, but I go masquerading often, and was not playing the rôle of Dashing Charlie when last we met."

"I see; but now you are playing the rôle of a thief."

"Well, yes, if you wish to call it by so harsh a name."

"That is the name I know you by best."

"Well, I won't quarrel with a man who is in your condition."

"What is that?"

"Under sentence of death."

"Oh, I don't mind that, for I think the chief and I can come to a compromise."

"So Doctor has just told me, said the chief coming up, for he had been holding a cross conversation with Doctor the while."

"I got tired of too great torture, and life is too short to destroy it when one can do otherwise," the officer said.

"You are a very wise man, sir," said Dashing Charlie.

"Well, now as I look at you more closely I do see that you are not my friend Dashing Charlie, though your resemblance to him is most wonderful at a casual glance."

"Yes, and upon closer inspection," was the answer.

"You are a trifle heavier than he is, and the devil in your nature reflects in your face as surely as his honesty shows from his."

"You think so?"

"Well, yes, and there is another difference."

"What is it?"

"You have blue eyes, while his are gray."

"Yes, that is the greatest difference between us."

"Are you two related, Lennox?" asked the chief.

"I do not think so, sir."

"I know you are not," said the officer.

"How so?"

"Oil and water will not mix, for he is a noble man, you are an ignoble specimen of degraded manhood."

"See here, you take advantage of your position to insult me," and Dashing Charlie placed his hand upon his revolver.

"I didn't think it was possible," was the cool response of the officer.

"Well, he is not one to quarrel with, Lennox, for he is in irons and my prisoner, and I have some business with him I wish to settle, so I'll see to getting you settled in your quarters," and the chief turned to call the outlaw Doctor, walking off a few paces, when Fred Gibbs whispered:

"I know you, Dashing Charlie, and you are here to rescue me."

"Yes," was the low reply, and the scout turned away.

CHAPTER LXV.

ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE.

THE conversation which the chief had with Lieutenant Gibbs was to the point.

He went with the supposed counterfeiter up to a secluded part of the canyon, and saw that his tent was pitched where he would be all to himself.

This done, he saw to his own quarters being made comfortable, and next visited his prisoner.

He found the officer as serene as ever, and said to him:

"Doctor tells me you are ready to confess."
 "He is mistaken, for I have nothing to confess."
 "How dare he make such a statement to me, then?"
 "I told him that when you returned, we might come to terms."
 "Ah, that was it?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, what do you offer?"
 "What do you ask?"
 "I wish you to make known the hiding-place of that treasure."
 "Am I to go free?"
 "You are."
 "What pledge have I?"
 "My word."
 "It is not sufficient."
 "What, do you—?"
 "Now keep cool and hear me."
 "Well?"
 "I am asked to give away a secret that gives you a quarter of a million dollars, and you promise me my life."
 "I do."
 "It is not enough."
 "What do you want?"
 "Let me suppose a case."
 "All right."
 "A young officer at the fort is supposed to be rich."
 "Yourself."
 "I am supposing a case."
 "Well?"
 "But he has lost money in speculations, which he has kept secret."
 "Yes."
 "And is largely in debt."
 "I understand."
 "He loves a girl who is an heiress."
 "I see."
 "And he has it in his power to get possession of her fortune."
 "Well?"
 "But he is a prisoner, and his life is threatened if he does not betray a secret that will enrich him."
 "I see."
 "Now if I were in that young officer's place, I would tell you very quickly what I would do."
 "What would you do so situated?"
 "I would say to my captor if I were so situated:
 "'Now you cannot get this gold without my aid, and if you kill me you lose it also.'
 "'But if you want it, be content with half.'
 "Half?"
 "Yes, take half of it, and leave the balance to the officer."
 "You are a schemer."
 "I am just telling you what I would say if I was situated as the young officer described."
 "Go on."
 "I would say just take a map I would give you, with written instructions, go to that secret hiding-place of the gold and take half, yes, a little more than half for good measure, and leave the balance there for the officer."
 "Then set him free and he will go with a party of soldiers after the gold and take it to the fort."
 "He will not be known to have betrayed his secret, and the gold found there will be thought to be all, and people will believe that the mistake was made by the miners in reporting that he had more gold than he really possessed."
 "Then this officer could marry the girl, you see, and have a snug little fortune for himself."
 "Do you understand the situation?"
 "Perfectly."
 "Do you accept?"
 "If I refuse?"
 "Then loving the girl, being in debt, and getting no gold, the officer would prefer death."
 "I believe you are honest in what you say."
 "You have but to put me to the test to find out how little I fear death under the circumstances," was the firm response.
 The chief looked into the face of the officer for fully a minute, and then he said slowly:
 "I believe you."
 "I will accept your terms."
 "You are wise."
 "When will you draw me the map?"
 "To-morrow, if you wish, for the sooner the better, as having come to terms with you I would hope to have a company of cavalry come and rescue me before our plan could be carried out."
 "Draw the map and directions for me to-day and I start this very night for that gold," was the eager response of Muello the Mexican.
 The chief could see no change in the face of the officer as he made known his plan, and at once ordered paper, pens and ink brought to him.
 He gave him the use of his own camp-table, and set free his hands for the work to be done.
 Then he left him at his task while he began arrangements for his trip.
 He did not wish his men to know where he was going, for only four were to accompany him, all of them being picked for their faithfulness to him.
 Doctor was one of them, and he had orders to see that double weapons were taken, a number

of pack-mules sufficient for the work in hand and ample provisions for the trip.
 Doctor eagerly set about his task, and soon reported all in readiness.
 Then the chief sought the supposed counterfeiter out in his tent and said:
 "See here, Lennox, I have a call away for a week, and which I hope will pan out well for us all."
 "I wish to leave you in command of the camp, to be careful that my prisoner shall have no chance to escape, for he might bribe some of the men."
 "I'll take good care he does not, chief."
 "And I wish you to hold the men very strict in camp, allowing only the game-hunters to go out."
 "Yes, sir."
 "I shall be back within a week, and where I am going I will have a chance to get rid of considerable of your counterfeit money, so you better let me have all you have on hand."
 "I am sorry, but the last plate with the signatures has not been put on the press, and it would take a couple of days to prepare and dry it, if you can wait that long."
 "How much could you give me, then?"
 "Some twenty thousand."
 "I cannot wait for so small a sum; but you have more?"
 "Yes, I can give you a couple of thousand that are ready."
 "Do so," and the chief pocketed the counterfeit money, after which he gave a few more instructions and went to the tent of his prisoner.
 "I just finished it, chief."
 "Good!"
 "Here is the map, and here the directions, so you cannot fail."
 "Thank you."
 "And you will act squarely by me?"
 "Indeed I will."
 "You ought to get back within four days."
 "I will; but do not speak to the men of why I go, for they might not like my not getting all the gold."
 "I understand, and can keep a secret."
 "Well, good-by," and the chief added: "Expect me back within the week."
 "I shall look for you," called out Frederic Gibbs, as the outlaw chief rode away in the gathering twilight, while he muttered to himself:
 "You will look for me in vain, fool that you are, for all of that treasure is mine, and never will I return—no, never!"
 And Frederic Gibbs murmured:
 "Poor fool, you are going upon a wild-goose chase."

CHAPTER LXVI.
 THE NEW COMMANDER.

THE Black Braves in the retreat were considerably startled the morning after the departure of their chief to discover that the prisoner was gone.
 There were his irons, and there was a horse missing, and that told the story.
 They rushed to give the alarm to the new commander, and to their surprise he laughed at them.
 "Why, you fools, what kind of guard do you keep that you do not know that the chief sent Doctor back after the prisoner last night and he went on after him."
 "I suspect that some of you must have been drunk, and the guard at the pass certainly was, to let him go by and not know him."
 Dashing Charlie knew well what he was talking about, for the guard was drunk, and others of the band also.
 And he had seen to it that such was the case, for he had let it be known where some bottles of brandy could be found, and they were found and disposed of with a result that he had intended.
 Thus quieted in their fears, for the men greatly feared their desperate, masked leader, the outlaws accepted the situation and went on about affairs as usual.
 Little did they dream that Frederic Gibbs was riding through the night as fast as he dared push his horse, straight for the fort.
 Cramped as he was from being ironed for so long, he yet would not spare himself, but pushed on.
 And quietly waiting in camp, Dashing Charlie pretending to be at work upon his counterfeit money, was going over the traps he had captured of the counterfeiters.
 He found there all the tools of an expert engraver and the utensils needed in counterfeiting, from the paper used to the small hand-press.
 He found too plenty of the bogus money, and all were securely packed together ready for traveling, for Dashing Charlie was expecting an event of importance to happen very soon.
 And he was not disappointed either, for there came upon the third night a wild cheer ringing up the canyon, the clatter of many hoofs and the clang of spurs and sabers.
 Then up dashed into the surprised outlaws' camp Lieutenant Fred Gibbs at the head of half a dozen scouts under Kit Kirby and his own gallant company of Boys in Blue.
 There was a short fight, a rapid rattling of

fire-arms and then the combat was over, just as the daylight crept over the scene.
 The sun rising revealed a dozen dead outlaws and as many more prisoners, while the supposed counterfeiter had come out and acknowledged himself as Dashing Charlie and not his Double.
 The dead were buried, and Kit Kirby with his half dozen scouts were left at the canyon, to catch the chief, should he return there when he discovered that he had been so cleverly sent on a wild-goose chase by the young officer, and the cavalry, with their prisoners and plunder, started on the march for the fort.
 They were espied afar off and such a welcome as they were given is beyond description, and the fort rung with the cheers for the heroes, Dashing Charlie and Lieutenant Gibbs.
 The following day there was a very summary execution in the fort, when the outlaws were executed by order of Colonel Buckner, while the counterfeiter, Lawrence Lennox, was sent East for trial for murder and his crime of counterfeiting, and for which he was justly punished.
 Kit Kirby and his scouts remained for two weeks at the outlaws' retreat, but the cunning chief did not return, for he was smart enough to see that having been deceived by his prisoner with a bogus map, a trap had been set for him to fall into, and he departed for other scenes, so that the Black Braves of Borderland were no longer heard of as the terrors of the Overland Trail, settlements and mining-camps.

CHAPTER LXVII.
 CONCLUSION.

THE rejoicing at Fort Blank was kept up for days, at the wiping out of Muello, the Mexican, and his band, and the only drawback was that the chief himself had not been captured.
 But it was supposed that he had returned to Mexico, after his complete defeat in the mountains where he had long held sway as an outlaw.
 In spite of the Gentleman Sport, Grayson Gurney's, devotion to Beatrice, he did not win her for his wife, and circumstances soon showed that he was not what he professed to be, but an escaped criminal, a fugitive from justice.
 And the Beautiful Mystery, as Creola Gray was called at the fort, was also discovered to be an adventuress, and but for Dashing Charlie unmasking her real character, she would have become the wife of Colonel Buckner, for which she was plotting when she was found out to be a fraud equal to the Gentleman Sport.
 In good time, however, it became known that the colonel's daughter had been won by that gallant young cavalry officer, Frederic Gibbs, and when the wedding-day arrived, the "best man" was the famous scout whose name will go down to history as Dashing Charlie, the White Scalper of the Plains.
 THE END.

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- 61 Buckhorn Bill; or, The Red Rifle Team.
- 92 Canada Chet; or, Old Ananconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 113 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
- 125 Bonanza Bill, Miners; or, Madam Mystery, the Forger.
- 135 Boss Bob, the King of Bootblacks.
- 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent; or, The Branded Brows.
- 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scamps.
- 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo; or, Lady Lily's Love.
- 236 Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado; or, Rowdy Kate.
- 240 Cyclone Kit, the Young Gladiator; or, The Locked Valley.
- 278 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
- 330 Little Quick-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggersville.
- 358 First-Class Fred, the Gent from Gopher.
- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
- 388 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
- 438 Santa Fe Sal, the Slasher; or, A Son's Vengeance.
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- 918 Kit Keith, the Revenue Spotter.
- 923 Sol Sharpe, the New York Night-Hawk.
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- 490 Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.
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- 536 Broadway Billy's "Diffikity."
- 557 Broadway Billy's Death Racket.
- 579 Broadway Billy's Surprise Party.
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- 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act; or, The League of Seven.
- 669 Broadway Billy Abroad; or, The Bootblack in Frisco.
- 675 Broadway Billy's Heat; or, Beating San Francisco's Finest.
- 687 Broadway Billy in Clover.
- 696 Broadway Billy in Texas; or, The River Rustlers.
- 708 Broadway Billy's Brand.
- 711 Broadway Billy at Santa Fe; or, The Clever Deal.
- 720 Broadway Billy's Full Hand; or, The Gamble Detective.
- 735 Broadway Billy's Business.
- 738 Broadway Billy's Curious Case.
- 753 Broadway Billy in Denver.
- 762 Broadway Billy's Bargain; or, The Three Detective.
- 769 Broadway Billy, the Retriever Detective.
- 775 Broadway Billy's Shadow Chase.
- 783 Broadway Billy's Beagles; or, The Trio's Quest.
- 786 Broadway Billy's Team; or, The Combine's Big Fall.
- 790 Broadway Billy's Brigade; or, The Dead Alive.
- 796 Broadway Billy's Queen Request.
- 800 Broadway Billy Ruffed.
- 805 Broadway Billy's Signal Scoop.
- 810 Broadway Billy's Wipe Out.
- 815 Broadway Billy's Bank Racket.
- 821 Broadway Billy's Bluff.
- 826 Broadway Billy Among Jersey Thugs.
- 833 Broadway Billy's Raid.
- 839 Broadway Billy's Big Boom.
- 844 Broadway Billy's Big Bulge.
- 849 Broadway Billy's \$100,000 Snap.
- 856 Broadway Billy's Blind; or, The Bootblack Stowaway.
- 862 Broadway Billy in London.
- 868 Broadway Billy Shadows London Slums.
- 874 Broadway Billy's French Game.
- 880 Broadway Billy and the Bomb-Throwers.

- 989 Bicycle Bob's Hot Search.
- 990 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, The Golden Keys.
- 999 Shasta, the Gold King; or, For Seven Years Dead.
- 420 The Detective's Apprentice; or, A Boy Without a Name.
- 424 Olbuta John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
- 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
- 467 Disco Dan, the Daisy Dude.
- 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
- 524 The Engineer Detective; or, Redlight Ralph's Resolve.
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
- 571 Air-Line Luke, the Young Engineer; or, The Double Case.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton; or, Running the Rascals Out.
- 615 Fighting Harry, the Chief of Chained Cyclones.
- 640 Bareback Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
- 647 Tynewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
- 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Pisane" Man of Ante Bar.
- 887 Battery Bob, the Dock Detective.
- 894 Arizona Dick's Wipe-Out.
- 900 Jumping Jack's Jubilee.
- 906 Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport.
- 912 Train Boy Trist's Hot Hustle.
- 918 The Trump Dock-Boy.
- 924 Big Boots Bob, the Fire-Ladder.
- 930 Rustler Ralph, the Boy Spotter.
- 935 The Ex-Newboy Detective's Chum.
- 941 The Bowling Green Detective's Drop.
- 944 Cowboy Charlie's Double.
- 947 The Bowery Wrestler; or, The Butcher-Boy's Backer.
- 953 Paddy's Trump Card; or, Silver Sallie, the Girl Sport.
- 960 The Broadway Sport; or, Fliver Fred's Clear Case.
- 967 \$1000 Reward; or, The Rival Reporters' Sleek Scoop.
- 973 Bantam Billy, the Corker-Ferret.
- 978 Plucky Pat, the Street-Boy Detective.

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- 956 Brooklyn Bob's Bulge; or, Dodger Dot's Diamond Snap.
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- 974 Old Sant's Dark Deal; or, Miner Mat's Iron Grip.

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- 988 Buffalo Bill's Lasso Throwers.
- 981 Buffalo Bill's Fighting Five.
- 975 Buffalo Bill's Rifle Shots.
- 969 Buffalo Bill's Rush Ride; or, Sure-Shot, the High-Flyer.
- 964 Buffalo Bill's Deceit; or, The Arizona Crack Shot.
- 958 Buffalo Bill's Mazepa-Chase.
- 948 Buffalo Bill's Snap-Shot; or, Wild Kid's Texan Tally.
- 942 Buffalo Bill's Tough Tusale.
- 936 Buffalo Bill's Boy Mascot; or, Joe Jarvis' Hold-up.
- 929 Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard; or, Butterfly Billy.
- 650 Buffalo Bill, the Prince of the Reina.
- 232 Bison Bill's Clue; or, Grit, the Bravo Sport.

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- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout; or, The Banded Brotherhood.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fanny Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

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- 191 Buffalo Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker.
- 194 Buffalo Bill's Bet; or, The Gambler Gulch.

BY T. J. FLANAGAN.

- 909 Midshipman Dare, the Pirate Catcher.
- 925 The Young Cowboy Captain.
- 933 The Two Midshipmen; or, The Corsair-Chaser's First Cruise.
- 949 The Three Lieutenants.
- 959 The Mascot Middy; or, The Four Commanders.
- 966 Fighting Jack Shubrick.
- 972 Fighting Jack's Middles; or, Dandy Dick's Dash.

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- 936 New York Nat and the Traitor Ferret.
- 920 New York Nat Trapped.
- 914 New York Nat's Three of a Kind.
- 908 New York Nat's Double.
- 902 New York Nat's in Colorado.
- 896 New York Nat in Gold Nugget Camp.
- 889 New York Nat's Deadly Deal.
- 888 New York Nat's Crook-Chase.
- 877 New York Nat's Trump Card.
- 871 New York Nat and the Grave Ghouls.
- 865 New York Nat's Masked Mascot.
- 859 New York Nat, the Gamble Detective.
- 853 Dick Doom's Kidnapper Knock-Out.
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- 772 Dick Doom's Death-Grip; or, The Detective by Destiny.
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- 758 Dick Doom in Boston; or, A Man of Many Masks.
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- 748 Dick Doom in the Wild West.
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- 808 Dick Doom's Death Clue.
- 815 Dick Doom's Diamond Deal.
- 819 Dick Doom's Girl Mascot.
- 829 Dick Doom's Shadow Hunt.
- 835 Dick Doom's Big Heul.
- 749 Dashing Charlie; or, The Kentucky Tenderfoot's First Trail.
- 756 Dashing Charlie's Destiny; or, The Renegade's Captive.
- 760 Dashing Charlie's Pawnee Pard.
- 766 Dashing Charlie, the Rescuer.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 787 Buck Taylor, the Comanche's Captive.
- 743 Buck Taylor's Boy; or, The Red Riders of the Rio Grande.
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 718 Pawnee Bill; or, Carl, the Mad Cowboy.
- 719 Pawnee Bill's Pledge; or, The Cowboy's Doom.
- 725 Pawnee Bill; or, Darling Dick.
- 692 Redfern's Curious Case; or, The Rival Sharps.
- 691 Redfern at Devil's Ranch; or, The Sharp from Texas.
- 702 Redfern's High Hand; or, Blue Jacket.
- 707 Redfern's Last Trail; or, The Red Sombra Rangers.
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- 589 Tom-Cat and Pard; or, The Dead Set at Silver City.
- 623 Tom-Cat's Trial; or, The Affair at Tombstone.
- 631 Tom-Cat's Terrible Task; or, The Cowboy Detective.
- 638 Tom-Cat's Triumph; or, Black Dan's Great Combine.
- 546 Captain Cactus, the Chaparral Cook; or, Josh's Ten Strike.
- 568 The Dandy of Dodge; or, Rustling for Millions.
- 576 The Silver Sport; or, Josh Peppermint's Jubilee.
- 585 Saffron Sol, the Man With a Shadow.
- 401 Happy Hans, the Dutch Vindicator; or, Hot Times at Round-Up.
- 611 Bilddad Barnacle, the Detective Hercules.
- 646 Cowboy Gid, the Cattle-Range Detective.
- 657 Warbling William, the Mountain Mountebank.
- 665 Jolly Jeremiah, the Plains Detective.
- 676 Signal Sam, the Lookout Scout.
- 689 Billy, the Gypsy Spy; or, The Mystery of Two Lives.
- 699 Simple Sim, the Broncho Buster; or, For Big Stakes.
- 712 The Measmerist Sport; or, The Mystified Detective.
- 723 Toltce Tom, the Mad Prospector.
- 745 Kansas Jim, the Cross-Cut Detective.
- 761 Marmaduke, the Mustang Detective.
- 773 The Rustler of Rolling Stone.
- 785 Lone Hand Joe, the Committee of One.
- 801 Kent Kirby, the High-Kicker from Kilbuck.
- 832 The Doctor Detective in Texas.
- 872 Two Showmen Detectives in Colorado.
- 927 The Texan Firebrand; or, Brazos Billy's Snap-Shot.
- 961 The Tramp's Trump-Trick.

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884 The Spotter-Sport's Neck-Tie Party.
870 High-Water Mark; or, Silver-Tip Sid.
862 Riata Rob, the Range Champion.
855 The Cowboy Chief's Sure-Shot.
848 The Rival Red-Hat Sports.
837 Curly Kid, the Cheyenne Sport.
824 The Soft Hand Detective.
815 The Soft Hand's Clutch.
809 Dan Dunn, the Soft-Hand Sport.
796 The Frisco Detective's Thug-Tangle.
789 Sam Cary, the River Sport.
780 The Dead Sport's Double.
771 Prince John, Detective Special.
763 Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.
754 The Man from Texas; or, Dangerfield, the Doctor Detective.
744 Sweepstakes Sam, the Silver Sport.
720 The Secret Six; or, Old Halcyon.
712 The Man of Silk.
705 Bantam Bob, the Beauty from Butte.
693 Kent Kasson, the Preacher Sport.
683 Bob Breeze, the Rounder Detective.
675 Steel Surry, the Sport from Sunrise.
668 Solemn Saul's Luck Struck.
661 The Get-There Sharp.
651 Silvertip Steve, the Sky Scraper from Siskiyou.
645 Gopher Gabe, the Unseen Detective.
636 Dandy Darling, Detective.
627 Mossback Mose, the Mountaineer.
617 The Grip Sack Sharp's Even up.
597 Big Bandy, the Brigadier of Brimstone Butte.
588 Sandy Sands, the Sharp from Snap City.
576 Silver-Tongued Sid; or, Grip Sack Sharp's Sweep.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul's Six Sensations.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Secret Service Spy.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
402 The Nameless Sport.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
387 Durk Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Man 'Way Back.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.

BY WM. G. PATTEN.

- 810 Fire-Eye, the Thug's Terror.
795 Old Night-Hawk, the Crook Shadower.
768 The Prince of New York Crooks.
756 Old Burke, the Madison Square Detective.
747 Double-voice Dan's Double Disguise.
715 Double-Voice Dan on Deck.
702 Double-Voice Dan, the Always-on-Deck Detective.
696 Double-Voice Dan, the Go-it Alone Detective.
689 The Sparkler Sharp.
676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
669 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
656 Old Pug Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

- 910 The Arizona Detective.
894 Silver Sam, the Shasta Sport.
880 The Silver Sport's Double.
868 The Race-Course Detective.
856 The Hayseed Detective.
772 Captain Corden, the Twister Detective.
755 Wild Pete, the Broncho-Buster Detective.
726 Fearless Sam, the Grand Combination Detective.
719 Boston Bob, the Sport Detective.
572 Jaunty Joe, the Jockey Detective.
554 Mad Sharp, the Rustler.
538 Rube Rocket, the Tent Detective.
526 Death-Grip, the Tenderfoot Detective.
507 The Drummer Detective.
432 The Giant Horseman.
398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.

BY WILLIAM R. EYSTER.

- 916 Two Dead-Square Sports.
902 Soft Velvet, the Man from Sandrock.
891 Genteel Jim, Sport-at-Large.
881 The Clubman-Crook's Cat's-paw.
867 The Frisco Sport.
852 The Stranger Sport's Shake-up.
828 Kirk King, the Man from Kirby.
818 Gentleman Dave, the Dead Game Sport.
783 The King-Pin Tramp.
767 The Sport of Silver Bend.
718 Uncle Bedrock's Big Bounce.
707 The Rival Rovers.
687 Double Cinch Dan, the Sport With a Charm.
677 Mr. Jackson, the Gent from Jaybird.
659 Gilt-Edge Johnny; or, Roldan and His Rovers.
650 Lucky Lester's Lone Hand.
634 Old Handcart's Big Dump.
622 The All Around Sports.
603 Desert Alf, the Man With the Cougar.
590 Gentle Jack, the High Roller from Humbug.
578 Seven Shot Steve, the Sport with a Smile.
568 The Dude Detective.
558 Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon.
549 Belshazzar Brick, the Bailiff of Blue Blazes.
533 Oregon, the Sport With a Scar.
503 The Dude from Denver.
478 Pinnacle Pete; or, The Fool from Way Back.
459 Major Sunshine, the Man of Three Lives.
429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.
402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
396 The Piper Detective; or, The Gilt Edge Gang.
375 Royal George, the Three in One.
356 The Handsome Sports; or, The Combination.
333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
229 Captain Outstave; or, The Little Sport.
214 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gertie of the Gulch.
183 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

- 657 Long Tom, the Privateer.
633 The Sea Spy.
621 The Red Privateer; or, The Midshipman Rover.
584 Fire Feather, the Buccaneer King.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
122 Saul Smabberday, the Idiot Spy.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 838 Old Grips Still Hunt.
827 Detective Walden's Web.
778 The Butler Detective; or, Old Grip's Grip.
770 The Showman Detective.
762 Old Grip, the Detective.
740 Captain Clew, the Fighting Detective.
732 The Hurricane Detective.
643 Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.
616 Magnus, the Weird Detective.
606 The Drop Detective.
595 Wellborn, the Upper Crust Detective.
582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
574 Old Falcon's Double.
561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
494 The Detective's Spy.
485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
477 Dead-arm Brandt.
467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
462 The Circus Detective.
451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 752 The Suspect Sport of Daisy Drift.
626 Ducats Dion, the Nabob Sport Detective.
612 Sheriff Stillwood, the Regulator of Raspberry.
598 The Dominie Detective.
591 Duke Daniels, the Society Detective.
580 Shadowing a Shadow.
565 Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.
557 The Mountain Graybeards; or, Riddles' Riddle.
519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger.
499 Twilight Charlie, the Road Sport.
472 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective.
452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.
436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.
368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 267 The White Squaw.
234 The Hunter's Feast.
213 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter.
200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Lake Queen.
66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
55 The Scalp Hunters. A Romance of the Plains.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 911 The Blue Blockader; or, The Coast Grayhound.
906 The Cuban Cruiser.
854 The Ocean Gipsy.
834 The Wild Steer Riders; or, Texas Jack's Terrors.
819 The Rival Monte Cristos.
805 The Last of the Pirates; or, Docm Driven.
801 The Water Wolves' Detective; or, Trapping the Grave Ghouls.
791 The Coast-Raider's Death-Chase.
748 Arizona Charlie, the Crack-shot Detective.
704 Invisible Ivan, the Wizard Detective.
685 The Red-skin Sea Rover.
679 Revello, the Pirate Cruiser; or, The Rival Rovers.
672 The Red Rapier; or, The Sea Rover's Bride.
662 The Jew Detective; or, The Beautiful Convict.
640 The Rover's Retribution.
635 The Ex-Buccaneer; or, The Stigma of Sin.
625 Red Wings; or, The Gold Seekers of the Bahamas.
615 The Three Buccaneers.
610 The Red Flag Rover; or, White Wings of the Deep.
605 The Shadow Silver Ship.
600 The Silver Ship; or, The Sea Scouts of '76.
593 The Sea Rebel; or, Red Rovers of the Revolution.
587 Conrad, the Sailor Spy; or, True Hearts of '76.
581 The Outlawed Skipper; or, The Gantlet Runner.
560 The Man from Mexico.
553 Max Monte, the Mutineer; or, The Branded Brig.
546 The Doomed Whaler; or, The Life Wreck.
530 The Savages of the Sea.
524 The Sea Chaser; or, The Pirate Noble.
510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
493 The Scouts of the Sea.
457 The Sea Insurgent; or, The Conspirator Son.
446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
399 The New Monte Cristo.
393 The Convict Captain.
377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
341 The Sea Desperado.
336 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
355 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
184 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 802 Dan Dirk, King of No Man's Land.
583 Captain Adair, the Cattle King.
567 Captain Midnight, the Man of Craft.
544 The Back to Back Pards.
522 The Champion Three.
502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Dick, Despard and the Sport.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 823 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.
811 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
805 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
276 Texa Chick, the Southwest Detective.
271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 619 Kit Bandy & Co., the Border Detectives.
148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.
99 The Giant Rifleman; or, Wild Camp Life.
43 Dakota Dan, the Reckless Ranger.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

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- 781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
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- 644 Buffalo Bill's Foranza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
- 632 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 629 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 839 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
- 820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
- 807 Wild Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
- 800 Wild Bill, the Dead-Center Shot.
- 639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
- 599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pard's of the Plains.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
- 401 One-Armed Par; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 153 Death-Trail, the Chief of Scouts.

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- 153 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
- 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

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- 883 The Man from Mexico in New York.
- 872 The King-Pin Shark; or, Thad Burr's Ten Strike.
- 861 The Tenderloin Big Four.
- 853 The Quaker City Crook.
- 844 Tracked to Chicago.
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- 829 The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand.
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- 798 Detective Burr's Luna Witness.
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- 742 Detective Burr Among the New York Thugs.
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- 728 Detective Burr, the Headquarters Special.
- 713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
- 706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
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- 680 XX, the Fatal Claw; or, Burr's Master Case.

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- 87 The Six-Shot Spotter.
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- 860 The Spangled Sport Shadower.
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- 618 Kansas Karl, the Detective King.
- 552 Prince Primrose, the Flower of the Flock.
- 528 Huckleberry, the Foot-Hills Detective.

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- 879 Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective.
- 871 The Crook Cashier.
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- 847 Hiram Hawk, the Harlem Detective.
- 840 Major Bullion, Boss of the Tigers.
- 831 Shadowing the London Detective.
- 817 Plush Velvet, the Prince of Spotters.
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- 788 The Night-Hawk Detective.
- 779 Silk Ribbon's Cru-sh-out.
- 766 Detective Zach, the Broadway Spotter.
- 751 The Dark Lantern Detective.
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- 724 Captain Hercules, the Strong Arm Detective.
- 711 Dan Damon, the Gift-Edge Detective.
- 701 Silver Steve, the Branded Sport.
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- 684 Velvet Van, the Mystery Shadower.
- 678 The Dude Desperado.
- 671 Jason Clew, the Silk-Handed Ferret.
- 664 Monk Morel, the Man-Hunter.
- 654 Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective.
- 642 Red Pard and Yellow.
- 608 Silent Sam, the Shadow Sphinx.
- 592 Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.
- 579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.
- 569 Captain Cobra, the Hooded Mystery.
- 559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
- 550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
- 543 The Magnate Detective.
- 532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
- 523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
- 512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
- 505 Phil Fox, the Gentle Spotter.
- 496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
- 487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
- 480 Hawkspare, the Man with a Secret.
- 478 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
- 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
- 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
- 441 The California Sharp.
- 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
- 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
- 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
- 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
- 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
- 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
- 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
- 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
- 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
- 352 The Desperate Dozen.
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- 486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
- 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
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- 518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred.

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